

THIS BOOK gives a clear, well-balanced outline of the principal figures and events in Russian literature from the early 19th century till the present day. It seeks the most significant Russian imaginative writers and thinkers both as participants in the problems of Russian social history and also in the light of their unique and lasting contribution to world literature and civilization. In so doing, it also reveals the true nature of those spiritual links which were forged between the civilizations of Russia and Europe in the 19th century, and helps to answer some of the inevitable questions which now face us about future relations between Russia and the west. The author, who has specialized in Russian studies and had practical experience of current affairs in Russia, was formerly a Laming Fellow of Queen's College, Oxford, and more recently Director of the Russian Division of the Ministry of Information. He has published English translations of some of the Russian classics, including the major works of Turgenev.

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RUSSIAN LITERATURE
FROM PUSHKIN TO
THE PRESENT DAY

by

RICHARD HARE



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‘To that enormously important question, “What, of all that has been written, is one to read?” only real criticism can provide a reply; criticism, which, as Matthew Arnold said, sets itself the task of bringing to the front and pointing out to people all that is best, both in former and in contemporary writers.

‘On whether such disinterested criticism, which understands and loves art and is independent of any party, makes its appearance or not, and on whether its authority becomes sufficiently established for it to be stronger than mercenary advertisement, depends, in my opinion, the decision of the question whether the last rays of enlightenment are to perish in our so-called European society, without having reached the masses of the people.’

L. TOLSTOY

PREFACE

THIS book tries to survey a wide field in a very restricted space. The many omissions and rigorous condensation, inseparable from such an attempt, can only be excused if I have succeeded in relating to a larger whole the significant parts which are often seen in isolation, and if I have sketched a coherent outline of the principal figures and events in Russian literature seen against their own background. I have thought it desirable to describe rather fully some of the more important works I mention which are likely to be unfamiliar to most readers, and to assign to certain authors almost unknown outside Russia more space than they would otherwise have received. For the same reason I have only written briefly about the most famous novels of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, but I have illustrated my view of their essential qualities by some detail from their less widely known work.

Russian literature since the advent of Pushkin first grew into a universal and cosmopolitan literature, but as it was written in a language which, however beautiful and expressive, very few non-Russians took the necessary trouble to master, its riches were imparted to the outside world chiefly through a limited number of translations which seldom did justice to their originals. French and English literatures, which have similar claims to universality, but which in the nineteenth century were not superior to Russian literature of the same period, were far more readily absorbed outside their countries of origin, since the languages in which they

of providing faith and guidance to withstand the harsh, sinister, and destructive elements in Russian society. The novel, as the most comprehensive literary form and the one closest to real life, acquired an epic and prophetic quality for the majority of literate Russians, and an author who forgot the high duty expected of him was quickly reminded and called to task by some authoritative critic like Belinsky or Pisarev.

Considering the close connexion between Russian literature and the problems of actual life in Russia, the English reader gains a deeper insight if he knows at least the landmarks of the historial background and enough about the biography of each author to explain important features of their work which would otherwise remain obscure. To take an obvious example: many strange things about Dostoevsky's novels become less baffling if one remembers that he was a victim of recurrent epileptic fits, worked four years in a Siberian prison camp—after having been previously sentenced to death—and spent the greater part of his life in a desperate struggle with poverty and ill-health. In any case so much Russian literature is autobiographical that it gives ample scope for comparison between the events as they occurred and the manner in which they later emerge, shaped in an author's memory and conception.

The naïve optimism about social progress which prevailed in early nineteenth-century Europe, including Russia, combined with the historical determinism of Hegel, had a far-reaching influence on Russian literature and thought, beginning with Belinsky. This state of mind was reinforced by

misleading analogies from biology and mechanical invention, and was responsible for fostering the belief that whatever human creation came later in time was bound to be better than what had preceded it. That progress in one field might be at the expense of retrogression in another was not then generally recognized, nor was it clear that artistic creation on which good literature depends—arises so sporadically that evolution in the ordinary sense cannot possibly be applied to it. In observing that Russian literary genius both flourished and declined in the nineteenth century, and that twentieth-century literature is inferior, let us avoid the confusion so often caused by assuming that technical improvements in material welfare are bound to be accompanied by higher achievements in literature and other arts, or by claiming that the very existence of artistic genius is some proof of the ethical superiority of that society in which it was born and bred. The exceptionally close ties linking Russian literature and Russian life oblige any adequate survey of the former to throw some light on Russian social history, but we can never afford to lose sight of the essential difference between the documentary record and the spontaneous life of the imagination, nor should we encourage immersion in a mass of documents which tell us little of literary significance.

Moreover, we must remember that when it is most intensely alive and tangible, Russian literature is far from being 'realistic', in the literal photographic sense in which that term has been used to define certain forms of Western literature and art. The best Russian author is far from holding a mirror up to nature. He interprets his facts, rejects chaotic or

monotonous details, for he is always probing into the souls of his characters, concerned with what they feel rather than with what they do, or with what they do as an indication of their state of mind. And he almost inevitably gives voice to a striving for something hitherto unattainable, right outside the everyday realistic setting, to an imaginative yearning which can hardly be called nostalgia—for Russia had never known a 'golden age' to look back to and sigh for—but which pointed either to the better life of some distant generation or to a more perfect spiritual world apart.

Some English readers are repelled by the powerful enveloping atmosphere of sadness and gloom which pervades many Russian writers and by the apparently endless suffering of many of the characters described. Certainly those who want soothing relaxation or entertaining light comedy will seek them elsewhere, though they may sometimes find empty entertainment more depressing than tragedy. Looking below the surface, however, we find that this undeniable strain of sadness rarely concludes, though it might well do so, on a note of final pessimism; on the contrary it is shot through and relieved by flashes of warm humour, by penetrating irony, and by a strong undertone of moral encouragement. No one could reasonably expect much care-free light-heartedness in the literature of a country so frequently ravaged as Russia has been by a disastrous history, a country which has been overrun and pillaged by wave after wave of foreign invaders, and periodically stricken by vast famines and internal disorders. Her literature cannot fail to reflect human reactions to such events; it naturally seeks both

enlightenment, escape, and creative opportunities; in many places it bears witness also to an exceptional resilience and a power of enduring one ghastly experience after another, without becoming exhausted, shrunken or embittered.

SLAVOPHILS AND WESTERNIZERS IN RUSSIAN LITERATURE

RUSSIA, through her geographical position and by her constant assimilation of migrating races, was for long a kind of colossal no-man's-land stretched between Europe and Asia. But the motive force of Asia in Russian territory gradually receded into the background after the Mongol conquest, and since Peter the Great opened his 'window on to Europe', the development of an individual Russian civilization and literature has been almost entirely the fruit of relations between Russia and western European countries. This restless and fertile play of dual forces became incarnate in Russian literature, where its intricate ramifications can be seen as a living conflict shaping the spiritual development of widely different personalities, and thus better understood than in the more abstract form of rival social movements and schools of thought. Indeed, to appreciate this peculiar dualism is a key to so much in Russian literature, that it is well to start by tracing its historical course through a number of the most representative Russian writers.

'Slavophilism,' wrote Alexander Herzen (1812-70, see Chapter IV), 'not as a theory or a doctrine, but as an indignant national feeling, as a dark memory and mass instinct, as a reaction against exclusively foreign influence, existed at the time when the first beard was shaved off by Peter the Great.' The terrific Westernizing activity of Peter,

who had not only centralized the state, but abolished the patriarchate (replacing it by the state-controlled Holy Synod) and imported thousands of European workmen and officials, was certainly the root cause of much of the future emotional cleavage between Slavophils and Westernizers. The early Slavophils did not realize that Peter's motives in acting as he did were entirely practical and far from unpatriotic (assuming that it was necessary for Russia to be welded into an autocratic centralized state) for Peter is himself reputed to have said: 'Europe is necessary to us for a few decades—and then we can turn our backs on her.'

Alexander Pushkin (1799–1837, see Chapter II), expressed the awakening national consciousness in a brief enthusiastic period when Emperor, nobles, Church and people were welded together and made common cause in driving out Napoleon's armies from Russian soil. 'An unforgettable time,' wrote Pushkin, 'a time of glory—with what unanimity we shared the feeling of national pride with that of love for the Emperor.' This harmonious joy was short-lived, and the optimism of Pushkin and of his friends the liberal Westernizing nobles, who believed in constitutional and social reforms, was hopelessly shattered by the abortive Decembrist rising. The complete failure of this movement, which wanted a limited monarchy and the abolition of serfdom, and was bloodily crushed by Nicholas I, had far-reaching effects, which may be briefly be described as three-fold. First, the discord between the Government and the more enlightened members of the nobility, the only educated class in Russia at that period, became embittered and increasingly irreconcilable.

Then, the intelligent members of that class realized that political action was premature and that a long period of preparatory educational work was needed before Russian society could be radically changed. Finally the forms of Western life, debarred from other outlets, degenerated into an exaggerated imitation by the nobility of decorative graces and fashionable—chiefly French—externals. Pushkin in his graceful, easy, mocking manner, refers to the young Russian lady who had been brought up on sentimental French novels and was consequently in love (*The Snowstorm*), and shows with wonderful clarity of perception how his young nobleman, Evgeny Onegin, 'dressed like a London dandy', with his mastery of the French language and of ballroom dancing, is doomed to graceful ineffectiveness in his own country. His best qualities are paralysed by his one-sided education. He is fated to turn into an aristocratic butterfly with no incentive to creative work, and too blasé to be able to love.

Herzen, in his memoirs, pronounced an even more comprehensive verdict on the same type of Westernized Russian. 'Foreigners at home, foreigners abroad, idle spectators, spoilt for Russia by Western prejudices, spoilt for Europe by Russian habits, they were intelligent but useless, and wasted themselves in an artificial life, in gratifying their senses, and in an intolerable parade of egotism.' His own father, he said, wrote French much more correctly than Russian, and never read a single Russian book.

For simplicity's sake, and because he spent the greater part of his life in exile, working in Europe for the political regeneration of his own country, Herzen has generally been described as a Westernizer.

In fact it is clear that after the failure of the 1848 revolutions, he completely lost faith in the progressive thought of Europe, which he could only continue to admire as a collection of exhilarating memories of a great civilized past. 'Chivalrous behaviour,' he wrote, 'the charm of aristocratic manners, the austere principles of Protestantism, the proud self-reliance of Englishmen, the luxurious life of Italian artists, the sparkling intellect of the Encyclopaedists, the gloomy energy of the terrorists—all these have dissolved and been transformed into a whole complex of totally different ruling conventions—those of the bourgeoisie. All parties and shades of opinion in this bourgeois world have gradually divided up into two principal camps—on one side the property-owning bourgeoisie, obstinately refusing to part with its monopolies—on the other side the bourgeoisie without property, who want to seize it from those who have, but lack the strength to do so; that is to say, on the one side, avarice, on the other, envy. Thus there is really no moral foundation to all this. . . . The atmosphere of European life is heaviest and most intolerable in those parts where these prevailing conditions are highly developed, which are the richest, most industrialized. That is why it is less stifling to live somewhere in Italy or Spain than in France or England.'

Another reason why Herzen has been labelled as a Westernizer was because the orthodox Slavophils frequently accused him of hating Russia, on the ground that he attacked almost all her existing institutions. Herzen vigorously denied this accusation, though he frankly admitted that in his love of

Russia there was something of hatred, for he could not help blaming the people as well as the Government for the miserable state in which Russia found herself. Nevertheless, there was some intangible element in Russian life in which Herzen had faith. 'I speak', he wrote, 'of that inward but conscious force which so remarkably sustained the Russian people under the yoke of the Mongol hordes and of the German bureaucracy. . . . Russia is the last nation, full of youthful striving for life, at a time when others feel already tired and declining.'

Slavophils and Westernizers agreed at least in two things, opposition to serfdom and to the rigid autocracy of Nicholas I; but they were like two doctors prescribing different remedies for the same disease. Both movements also arose from the one source, the riper national consciousness of the early nineteenth century; but the Slavophils, with their religious aversion to excessive rationalization, did not formulate their ideas in such a definite and systematic manner as the Westernizers. The early Slavophils emphasized the uniqueness of Russian historical development. Though she might need to borrow technical devices from Europe, Russia must fight against losing her soul, endangered by self-depreciation and by a slavish imitation of foreign institutions. Moreover, the Slavophils sensed an evil thing in the all-powerful government machine created by Peter and his predominantly Baltic German bureaucracy. The older Russian heritage of the orthodox Christian faith, the peasant commune and enduring folk traditions, cemented by patriarchal personal relations between land-owner and peasant, were for them the only stable

foundations on which Russia should build her own unique civilization, with its redeeming mission for humanity.

S. T. Aksakov (1791–1859, see Chapter III) in his *Family Chronicle* and *Years of Childhood* unfolds before us in a beautiful clear untroubled style the life of big Russian landowners at the end of the eighteenth century. There is an epic grandeur in the picture of his pioneering grandfather developing his new estate in the rich black-earth steppes between the Volga and the Ural mountains, on land acquired from the nomad Bashkirs. The simple energetic life, the warm feeling for the Russian countryside, the strong personal relations of love and respect, uniting, in certain cases, both serfs and masters, are described by Aksakov with delightful freshness and objectivity. His writings remained the chief literary inspiration of the Slavophils, and his two sons, who were as deeply attached to his memory as he was to that of his grandfather, became, after Khomyakov,¹ the leading publicists of the Slavophil movement.

What S. T. Aksakov was to the Slavophils as a moral and artistic inspiration, Vissarion Belinsky (1811–48, see Chapter IV) was to the Westernizers as an intellectual guide with a fury for rational clarity. Deeply involved in the then prevalent study of Hegel's philosophical system, he believed in a synthesis which combined Russian national characteristics with elements imported from abroad. 'The destiny of Russia', he wrote, 'is to take into herself those elements of European and world civilization, as is

¹ A. S. Khomyakov (1804–60) patriotic poet and religious thinker, a most influential early Slavophil.

sufficiently shown by her historical development, geographical position and the variety of races composing her. Of course the reception of these elements cannot be mechanical or eclectic, but must be organic, and concrete. Taken into the Russian spirit they are assimilated and acquire a new specific character.' Belinsky was at pains to point out not only that there already existed a specifically Russian civilization (he was the great critical exponent of Pushkin, Lermontov, and Gogol), but also that this civilization had a strong enough digestion to absorb the most varied foreign products and to flourish on them without running any risk of being poisoned or perverted. In Belinsky's opinion only weaklings or weak nations needed 'Chinese walls to preserve their national identity'. 'We take from the English', he wrote, 'their industry, their general practical capacity, but in so doing we need not become mere industrialists or businessmen.' As a sign that there were certain ideals which they shared, it is worth remembering that both Belinsky and Aksakov were roused to indignation by Gogol's *Correspondence with Friends* (1843), published a few years before his death. This strange medley of melancholy self-analysis and exhortation to religious quietism flagrantly contradicted the brilliant and daring social satire which had previously animated his long unfinished novel *Dead Souls* and his play *The Government Inspector*.

Nicolas Gogol (1809-52, see Chapter II) himself passed through a series of complicated emotional crises, and in his last writings his religious excitement, amounting to mania, had almost clouded his reason. In satirizing the spiritual emptiness and

gross vulgarity of provincial landowners and officials he did not attempt to draw any conclusions, nor did he appear to attribute these prevailing personal defects to the institutions of serfdom or soulless bureaucracy. He rather inclined to the view that such miseries were decrees of fate, and that they could only be diminished by a revival of personal religious belief and action. He really took little interest in national institutions or politics, and even in his wonderful pictures of Russian types his subject was not so much the Russian in Russia as the human soul in general. But, whether consciously or not, Gogol contributed much to building up that mystic amorphous nationalism which formed the emotional background of the Slavophils, and his influence on Dostoevsky was profound. In a well-known passage in *Dead Souls* he addressed from Rome his distant country, and compared the huge, open monotonous spaces of Russia with the varied and picturesque charms of Italy. 'Yet what is this inconceivable force that attracts me to you?' he wrote. 'Why are my ears filled with the sound of your sad songs as they are wafted along your valleys and huge plains? What is there in that song which, as it falls and rises, grasps at the heart? What are those melancholy yet soothing notes which pierce the heart and enslave the soul? What does that indefinable unbounded expanse foretell? Are not schemes to be born there as boundless as yourself?' These questions were rhetorical and Gogol never tried to answer them. On the other hand, with all his peculiar patriotism, he did not waste any sympathy on the boastful, self-satisfied Russian who was conceited about his country, and he referred

reproachfully to those of his young compatriots who enjoyed showing off their achievements to Western Europeans, but who remained fundamentally unmethodical and incurably lazy.

A special turn was given to the Slavophil-Westernizer conflict by I. S. Turgenev (1818-83, see Chapter III). At the age of nineteen he fulfilled his dream of going abroad to study, for he was firmly convinced, like Belinsky, that the source of progressive knowledge was to be found in Europe. 'We still believed', he wrote, 'in the efficacy and importance of philosophical and metaphysical ideas, although neither Belinsky nor I were philosophers at all, and we were not capable of thinking in the abstract German manner—in any case, we were trying to find in philosophy everything in the world except pure thought.'

Turgenev had taken a vow to fight against Russian serfdom, and as a professing Westernizer he fully approved the drastic work of Peter the Great, which he called a '*coup d'état*', one of the violent jerks from above which helped to push Russia into the European family of nations. 'The necessity of similar reforms has not ceased,' he wrote in his *Literary Recollections*. 'History will show what place we are destined to take, but up to these times we have followed and are obliged to follow ways (in which the Slavophil gentlemen will not agree with me) other than the more or less organic development of Western nations.' Later on he remarked: 'We do not need now any unusual talents or outstanding minds—neither too large nor too individual—we must reconcile ourselves without disgust to the petty, dull tasks and routine work of daily life. The feeling

of duty, and of patriotism in the genuine sense of that word, is all that is necessary; we are entering a period of merely useful people—they will be better people; there will probably be many of them—but very few beautiful or charming ones.'

Yet Turgenev, in spite of his effort to see the best in them, did not really feel at home among the useful and rational beings who started to come into their own after the abolition of serfdom in 1861. He certainly could not find in these sober signposts of the future that rich and mellow background of the traditional pre-reform Russia to which he instinctively returned in the majority of his novels and stories. The gardens and parks of the 'noblemen's nests' were being overgrown with weeds, the ancient lime-avenues were cut down for timber, largely owing to the sheer fecklessness of their owners; Turgenev saw that such a mode of life was doomed, but his artistic genius was still irresistibly attracted by it. In this autumnal setting he created the figure of Lavretsky, the enlightened but unlucky landowner, and the devoted self-sacrificing Liza, a lineal descendant of Pushkin's Tatiana.

It would, however, be quite misleading to claim that Turgenev only found inspiration in the nostalgic culture of the pre-reform landed aristocracy. In *Rudin* (1850) he depicted with great sympathy the eloquent reforming idealist of the 'forties, who redeemed his ineffective life by dying in the Paris barricades of the 1848 rebellion. In the Bulgarian Insarov, the hero of his novel *On the Eve* (1860), he portrayed a more efficient and fanatical revolutionary. Both this character and that of his Russian bride, the almost morbidly *exaltée* Helena, are

drawn with much less conviction than the figure of Rudin, but the novel illustrates vividly a more deeply political feature which came to the fore in the Slavophil movement after the Crimean War (1853-6). This feature was an active emotional sympathy with the other Slav people of Europe, particularly with those under Turkish rule. Here was an outlet for wounded national pride to recover from the bitter humiliation of the Crimean War, and, in working for the liberation of their smaller Slav brethren from Turks and Habsburgs, the Russians found some practical fulfilment for the powerful Slavophil belief in Russia's special mission to the world, in an original creation of their own, distinct from the civilizations of Asia and Europe.

In *Fathers and Sons* (1862) Turgenev created his most controversial hero Bazarov, the prototype of the Nihilist. It proves the superb objectivity of Turgenev's artistic and psychological insight that both radical Westernizers and conservative Slavophils reviled him for this novel, the former on the ground that he had grossly and maliciously caricatured their followers, while the latter accused him of crawling at Bazarov's feet, of craving as a boon for one of his condescending smiles, of having set up as an idol for the younger generation a cold-blooded boor, who enjoyed dissecting frogs, an atheist, and a materialist. Turgenev was naturally upset and disgusted when both the rival intellectual factions failed to understand his work, and indulged in equally distorted interpretations of his purpose. He created the figure of Bazarov, and used the word 'Nihilist'—he pointed out—not with any ulterior motive, but as a fruitful and appropriate expression

of a living historical fact. To seize and reconstruct in fiction the full truth and reality of the contemporary life around him was for Turgenev the highest duty and satisfaction of the creative writer—even if this truth conflicted with the writer's own sympathies and aspirations. He described himself as a radical and incorrigible Westernizer, and yet in his novel, *A Nobleman's Nest* (1858), he introduced a scene in which all the vulgar and ridiculous sides of the Westernizer were shown up in a dispute between Panshin, the pompous, cold, and cunning St. Petersburg official, who played with every important political and administrative question like a juggler with balls, and the dignified Slavophil Lavretsky, who spoke little but to the point, and when asked by his rival what he intended to do in Russia, replied: 'To plough the land, and plough it as well as possible.'

The agnostic and scientific phase of the Westernizing radical in Russia, immortalized in the figure of Bazarov, was followed in the 'seventies by the more complex movement of the populists, who combined the Slavophil faith in the Russian peasant and his traditions with some Western emphasis on human perfectibility through natural science and rational systematic education. The peasant with his commune, hard manual work and uncorrupted mind, was suddenly discovered to be the unconscious bearer of a natural socialism, and to be a model of good citizenship greatly superior to Rousseau's 'noble savage'. It was not quite clear what and how much the peasantry had to learn from the urban intellectuals, and what the latter had to learn from them; but the gulf between the two must somehow be bridged.

Turgenev dealt with this problem in his last novel, *Virgin Soil* (1877), and implied that the gulf at its widest points had already become unbridgeable. The populist movement was in fact a failure, and the primitive peasants remained indifferent, suspicious, or hostile to the alien intellectuals who came to work among them. In this analysis of the inadequacy of well-intentioned educational work as a means of solving Russian social problems, Turgenev showed his usual clear-sightedness, inevitably tinged with melancholy. Morally guided by firm practical convictions, he remained a prey to honest doubt on many theoretical issues, although he thirsted to believe.

Tolstoy (1828-1910, see Chapter V) reached a similar conclusion as far as the educational side of the populist movement was concerned, but his whole approach to the problem was different, and he ended, as is well known, by proclaiming the best Russian peasant as the incarnation of uncorrupted practical Christianity, providing the example which all intellectuals should strive to follow. His complete conversion to this belief was gradual, but step by step, with that passionate sincerity which was characteristic of him, he elaborated his austere faith, and with a remorseless consistent logic swept away the moral foundations of almost every established institution, including the whole Russian system of government and the orthodox Church,¹ which blocked the path to his ideal or failed to satisfy his conscience. Tolstoyism, which acquired world-wide fame and disciples, is still sufficiently known in its broad outlines. I mention it here as a creative offshoot of the traditional Slavophil-Westernizer controversy, as I

¹ Tolstoy was ex-communicated by the Holy Synod in 1902.

think it has, when seen from that angle, a significance which is sometimes missed.

In the character of Nicolas Rostov in *War and Peace*, and more fully in that of Levin in *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy had pictured with sympathy and some degree of optimism the problem facing the liberal landowner in adapting Western ideas and methods of work to the primitive agricultural communities of Russia. But after the completion of *Anna Karenina*, when he was nearing the age of fifty, he began to feel increasingly dissatisfied with his own life as a landowner and with the luxurious aristocratic culture of the class to which he belonged. What struck him particularly, he said in his *Confessions*, was that their wealthy, varied, and complicated life did not seem to bring them any happiness, indeed, that these people, more than others regarded life as evil and bitterly disappointing. Tolstoy went on to draw the logical conclusion that either these highly civilized people must be fundamentally mistaken, and that we must search for true culture elsewhere, or that they must be stupid and cowardly in spite of their intelligence, if they deliberately went on living, when fully convinced that life is evil. 'I was ready now', wrote Tolstoy, 'to accept any faith if only it did not demand denial of reason. I learned Buddhism and Mohammedanism through books, but principally Christianity, both through books and through the living people surrounding me. I turned to the believers among the poor simple uneducated people. I saw that the whole life of these people was spent in heavy work and yet they were satisfied with life. Their superstitions are part of their lives, but are less gross than the

superstitions of the intellectuals. How often I envied the peasants their illiteracy and ignorance.'

No one should have been better aware than Tolstoy of what the Russian peasant was really like, for he spent his life among them, founded his own village school in Yasnaya Polyana, and during his later years ploughed, sowed, and reaped with them in peasant clothes. And yet the kind of peasant idealized by Tolstoy and the Slavophils resembles rather the devoted family serf of pre-reform days than the emancipated but more unstable peasant of the later nineteenth century, tainted by that urban civilization which Tolstoy condemned. Most typical of his many expressions of this peasant ideal is the personality of Platon Karataev in *War and Peace*; it is limpid and harmonious, undisturbed by internal conflict. Platon is a perfect slave, like the 'natural slave' of Aristotle, almost unconscious of his own personality. Concern for his own welfare or advancement does not trouble his mind, and his whole life is given to the service of others, as if obeying an unquestioned law of nature. 'He could do everything, not very well, but never badly. He kneaded bread, cooked, sewed, and cobbled—he sang songs, not like professional singers who know they have listeners, but like a bird, simply because he had to sing. It seemed to Pierre that Platon Karataev had affection for everything he met in life, particularly for human beings, but not for any human being in particular.' Though it is impossible not to admire this extraordinary figure, one cannot help feeling that he is farther from contemporary life than almost any other of Tolstoy's principal characters. Nor can this be simply explained as the result of a

deliberate adaptation to the early nineteenth century setting, for the other main characters in *War and Peace* are genuine psychological contemporaries of their author.

At the same time Tolstoy felt such profound horror for the abuse of modern scientific knowledge and material comfort, that he was little interested in improving the lot of the Russian peasant by the application of these Western ideals. He reduced the social question to a purely moral and personal one. Deprived of his rustic simplicity, the peasant would lose his soul, his religion; therefore he should be preserved from the depraving influence of urban wealth and artificiality. In his *Power of Darkness*, Tolstoy shows that the criminals and drunkards are worst among the richer peasants. Vice and degeneration have entered the peasant hut through the commercial shops and the inns, and with the fatal temptations of earning more money more easily and in other than agricultural work.

However, we need not conclude that Tolstoy merely developed into a fanatical Slavophil reactionary, condemning all science and art, and the progressive material and spiritual development connected with them and the traditions of the West. He wanted these other things, but he wanted them to serve different ends. 'Genuine science and genuine art', he wrote in *What is Art*, 'should follow only religious aims. Contemporary science and art follow trivial or depraved aims. Art is that medium through which people communicate emotion to others; art is legitimate only under the condition that it communicates emotions useful for the purposes of society, which are in the active love of

people for each other, or to put it differently, art should transfer religious knowledge from the sphere of reason to the sphere of feeling.' Seeing his life and work as a whole, there is surely much less contradiction between Tolstoy the artist and Tolstoy the moral philosopher than many of his more superficial critics have led us to believe. What Tolstoy had created in the sphere of feeling in his own novels he tried vainly to carry in later life into the sphere of reasoned action; in so doing he used a thoroughly Western instrument of precise analytical logic in defence and elucidation of an essentially Slav ideal, interpreted through his genius in a highly problematic but—he thought—universally applicable manner. For he was unable to see any good in the rising tide of industrial civilization in its Western forms, and though he believed that natural forces are stronger than individuals, he rejected all Western versions of historical determinism. He travelled as far afield as England in early life to study educational methods, but he was never an admirer of Western 'progress'; his attitude to European moral values is illustrated by his sarcastic reference in *Anna Karenina* to the English novel which Anna was reading in the train at the point where the hero was about to achieve his 'English happiness, a country estate and a baronetcy'.

In spite of the great contrast between the works of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky (1821–81, see Chapter V), both in temperament, psychology, and subject-matter, they are much alike in their concentration on personal moral problems, and in their common belief that Russia had her own spiritual mission for the world, a mission which did not depend on further

importations of Western culture, nor on political or economic power. In describing his own literary beginnings, Dostoevsky said, 'We all came out of Gogol's *Overcoat*'. It is true that in his earlier works, e.g. his novel *Poor People*, Dostoevsky follows the line of that famous story in his deep sympathy for the downtrodden, offended, and injured 'small people', and he shows a quality of rational humanitarianism, of Western radicalism, almost akin to Dickens. But soon Dostoevsky became absorbed in the personal psychological effects of contemporary social tension and in tracing its peculiar reactions on specifically Russian human types. For instance, in *Crime and Punishment*, according to the theory of Raskolnikov, useless people could be killed for a sound reason without any moral stigma being attached to the murderer. But he is a poor hungry student who loses the solid ground beneath his feet because Western ideas have intoxicated him. His conscience could not be stifled so easily, and Raskolnikov goes through such mental tortures after his crime that he voluntarily gives himself up to justice. His heart is only opened in penal servitude. This is a recurring theme in Dostoevsky's works; for he believed passionately that suffering is indispensable for moral progress. Indeed the impression derived from the more hysterical self-lacerating characters of his novels is that he abnormally enjoyed suffering for its own sake, though his acute sincerity grips us even when the border-line between sanity and madness grows strangely blurred.

Dostoevsky's form of belief in the Russian mission, his own version of the Slavophil movement, is also implicit in his novels, but it is most vividly

summarized in his famous speech commemorating Pushkin, delivered in Moscow only a few months before his death. Peter's reforms, he said, must have been due to some much greater aim than mere immediate utility. 'We took into our soul the genius of foreign nations and thus showed our readiness and predilection for the universal human unification of all branches of the great Aryan race. Yes, the destiny of the Russian is to be super-European and universal. To be a real Russian, a complete Russian, it may only be necessary to become the brother of all men. All this is called Slavophilism; and what we call Westernism is only a great, though a historical and inevitable, misunderstanding. To the Russian, Europe and the affairs of the great Aryan race are as dear as the affairs of his native country, because our affairs are those of the whole world. This may sound arrogant. We are destined to speak a new word in human history. I am not speaking of economic prowess, of the power of the sword or of science. I speak only of the brotherhood of human beings. It is absurd to affirm that our poor and disorderly land cannot foster such a high mission until it has adopted the economic and social structure of Europe. The genuine moral treasures of the soul, in their essence at least, do not depend on economic power.'

Here is the mystic nationalism of the Aksakovs with a touch of the religious exaltation of Russia's wandering holy men, but obviously a conviction as much opposed to the cruder kind of political pan-slavism, as to rational Westernization. On the whole this speech conforms with Dostoevsky's prevailing attitude, but we must not forget that, unlike

Tolstoy, he had scant regard for logical consistency, and was quite capable of announcing on the same subject in a different context that Constantinople should rightly belong to the Russian Empire. Indeed; he said so plainly in his *Diary of a Writer*, though he added in one place, 'not by seizure or violence'.

He is considerably clearer in his broad picture of the relations between the intelligentsia and the Russian people; the former representing the proud overbold carriers of experimental Western ideas, which they distorted or misapplied, and whose task, if they are to avoid self-destruction, is to feel and interpret the real needs of the people, the silent, grey, ignorant, long-suffering masses, whose enigmatic future after emergence from serfdom at once fascinated and alarmed Dostoevsky, as it did so many Russian writers of that time. The fusion of intelligentsia and people must take place if disaster was to be avoided, but what form should that fusion take, and how was it possible at all?

Dostoevsky saw this question, in so far as he saw it concretely, in terms of mutual understanding between officialdom, the intelligentsia and the masses, as Tolstoy had seen it more exclusively in terms of moral relations between the ruling aristocracy who had gone astray and the rural peasantry who were unspoilt but easily spoilable. Dostoevsky had no mercy for the intellectual who through false pride and hard-heartedness remained aloof or merely theoretical. His own experiences as a political prisoner in a Siberian convict settlement constantly rose to the surface in his curious insistence that only a criminal—admittedly a repentant one—can acquire

the deepest sense of justice. But neither the striving for justice and order, nor the dignity of the human individual—essentially Western concepts as applied to society—occupied the first place in Dostoevsky's mind. For him these must yield to an imperative demand for self-renunciation as the only alternative to mad individual anarchy, and be fused in a religious emotion almost equivalent to orthodoxy in its traditional Russian form, but more intimately linked with the illiterate masses. The very lack of national definition in the Russian people enhanced in his view their supreme humanity.

Saltykov-Schedrin (1826-80, see Chapter IV) a contemporary of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, tried to enjoin a more matter-of-fact, sober attitude to the peasant. A worldly Westernized government official, he had a tremendous gift for satire, which could be both refined and savage, and he refused to be carried away by the unbalanced fervour of populism. He could, however, offer nothing positive to take its place, and his greatest novel, *The Golovlev Family*, is a powerful nightmare-like but purely negative description of desperate 'decay' in the old landowning class. When reproached by a Slavophil for his disdain of the people, Saltykov replied: 'My critic does not distinguish the difference existing between the people as we know it in our actual history, and the people as the repository of the idea of democracy. The former is appreciated and entitled to our sympathy in proportion to the efforts made by it to attain consciousness—while it is impossible not to sympathize with the latter because it comprises the beginning and end of every individual activity.'

Gleb Uspensky (1840-1902, see Chapter VI) was

the next writer who after long scrutiny failed to find in the Russian peasant those wonderful unimpaired qualities which populism had ascribed to him. His sad stories illustrate the decline of the peasant commune divided up between a new class of prosperous town-influenced peasants, 'Kulaks', and pauperized peasants degenerating into a reckless and drunken rural proletariat. Populism was thus gradually ceasing, even in literature, to maintain its inspiring, progressive character, and the way was clear for the triumph of Marxism, a form of Westernization of Russia more extreme than anything which Peter the Great could have imagined, and through its concentration on the theories of two Germans, Marx and Engels, differing fundamentally from Peter's reforms, which had been drawn from the widest range of established institutions actually existing in the vigorous Europe of his day.

The work of V. Veresaev (1867-1945, see Chapter VIII), an ardent populist who became a convert to Marxism, illustrates strikingly the final pre-revolutionary phase of the old dualism between Slavophil and Western elements in Russian literature. Veresaev was, like Chekhov, a country doctor. I will refer to two of his works, published within ten years of each other. In the first of these short novels, *Without a Road* (1894), he describes how a cultured and conscientious doctor leaves his home and devotes himself heart and soul to a struggle against an epidemic of cholera spreading in the neighbouring village. The people's original dark suspicion of him and his methods is gradually dispelled by the knowledge that he had saved several lives. Nevertheless, rumours spread that the doctor has poisoned the water in

the wells. One evening a crowd of drunkards gathers together, hurls the vilest accusations at the doctor, and lynches him. He recovers consciousness for a few hours before he dies in his own hospital, and these were his last thoughts. 'I had strength, I had love, but my life has been in vain, and death, now approaching me, is equally senseless and fruitless. They beat me like a mad dog, when they only owed me thanks. I worked for five weeks among them, in every movement showing my zeal to help and serve them. Yet I could not even win their confidence—I forced them to believe in me, but a glass of vodka was enough to destroy that. . . . I thought I could conquer in these five weeks what had grown up in them over many years. Since when have they been accustomed to find friends in us? When did they ever profit from our learning; from everything which put us higher than they? We were always strangers to them. Nothing bound them to us. We were people of another world turning away from them and ignoring them.' Yet when he opens his eyes he sees before him the silent figure of Stepan, one of the peasants he had cured, sitting at his feet. He ends by telling the girl he had wanted to marry that she must love the people, and work assiduously, for there is so much work to be done.

In the second and later story, *The End of Andrey Ivanovich* (1903), Veresaev shows the dawn of revolutionary consciousness in the urban working class. The hero, a bookbinder, complains that the factory workers drink too much and become mere brutes. His friend denies this accusation. 'They are no savages,' he exclaims, 'when a boy has worked twelve hours in a factory, when he comes out, dazed,

with his head aching, and yet hurries to his evening class without even giving himself time to eat—do you call that savagery? They want to know everything; they will not give in. They won't let themselves be led by the nose any longer. They want to know the laws of life, its sense. . . . At one evening class an explanation was being given of the difference between scientific and artistic literature. For example, a piece of literature is scientific if it describes an investigation of how the factory worker is housed—how many cubic metres of air he has to breathe, what is the infant-mortality rate, how much alcohol he consumes in a year. Artistic literature would describe just the same subject in an emotional way. A labourer is dying, his wife weeps, the children are hungry. Everything around is dirty, damp, and bare. And the man wants to know for what purpose he has exhausted himself with work. He has only seen the ghost of life through the smoke of the factory.'

With what an abrupt and sweeping change of outlook this last story challenges the preceding one! Here the purpose of literature is already drastically simplified, and we have a preliminary sketch of those sternly disciplined Marxist converts who conquered Russia with the newest and most shattering form of Westernization. We shall see later how the Slavophil-Westernizer dualism was expressed by the symbolists (see Chapter VII), and re-emerged in literature after the October revolution (see Chapters VIII and IX).

The masterpieces of Russian literature were created by a very small number of highly gifted personalities who inevitably clashed with the more

primitive background of their native land. But even ardent Westernizers, like Herzen, who started by looking to Europe for a shining example of rational and scientific progress, ended by admiring her more for what still survived of her splendid civilized past; and even the portentously Slavophil Dostoevsky held this belief in common with Tolstoy, that Russia's civilizing 'mission' could not be fulfilled unless she ceased to imitate an increasingly atheistic and mercenary new Europe and rejected the guidance of cold vindictive rootless intellectuals, 'robbers for progress, demons preaching paradise. Thus when Russia fell under the sway of the latest and most arrogant school of Western rationalism, just as it was nearing saturation point in Europe itself, she deviated widely from the ideals expressed by her greatest imaginative writers, but the seed of Marxism fell on fertile ground in places previously prepared by Hegel's infiltration into the radical intelligentsia through Belinsky and his successors. Indeed, by the end of the nineteenth century Russian literary personalities began to be nearly submerged in the surging eddies of agitated intellectual movements from the West, especially from German sources. Therefore this later period of Russian literature, particularly since 1917, cannot be treated like the earlier one, since it is far more dominated by borrowed preconceived theories about literature than by spontaneous thought or imaginative creation.

THE AGE OF PUSHKIN, LERMONTOV, AND GOGOL

PETER THE GREAT, who made education compulsory for the Russian gentry, also drastically secularized their whole culture. Thus the influence of the ecclesiastical seminaries on Russian language and thought decreased, though they continued to mould most of the educated plebeians. One of these, Michal Lomonosov (1711-65), son of a fisherman and a great figure in the newly founded Academy of Sciences (1726), helped to preserve the best of the church Slavonic vocabulary and expressions in his multitudinous writings, and enriched Russian secular literature just at the moment when it was about to be shaped and polished by the aristocratic poet G. Derzhavin (1743-1816) and by the novelist historian N. Karamzin (1766-1826). The old stereotyped forms of moral tales, designed chiefly to save the sinner's soul by fright and exhortation, began to pall on readers to whom the treasures of civilized eighteenth-century Europe had been thrown open. The small upper stratum of educated Russians, with little literary tradition of their own, finding themselves face to face with the mature and elaborate literature of the West, assimilated it voraciously and with remarkable thoroughness—especially the works of Racine, Voltaire, and Rousseau, and, from England, Richardson and Pope.

A. Sumarokov (1717-77), who started as a strict imitator of Racine in pseudo-classical tragedy, later

abandoned tragedy for comedy, and trite verse for bad prose, but he at least introduced real Russian characters into his plays. Indeed, pseudo-classical heroies both in drama and verse were soon found tedious by the cosmopolitan, quick-witted connoisseurs who now formed the reading public. St. Petersburg and Moscow society demanded a different literature which could express lively emotion as well as formal elegance and grace. So the pseudo-classical in turn made way for the sentimental, and the authors knew what they were doing and why they did it. To the majority of readers the facts of everyday life in Russia were brutal, gloomy, or monotonous. The cultured must refresh themselves by looking away from this sad spectacle—at least from time to time—and plunging into a beautiful imaginary world of ideal emotions. Many high officials shed tears over Karamzin's most popular novel, *Poor Liza*. He himself wrote in 1796: 'Only that which does not exist in reality is beautiful, said Jean-Jacques Rousseau. If the beautiful, like a fleeting shadow, perpetually escapes us, we must at least retain it in our imagination. A poet has two lives, two worlds. If he is bored and dissatisfied with reality, he departs to the land of his imagination and lives there in paradise, according to his desires and his heart's content, like a pious Mohammedan with his seven houris.'

Poets and essayists could thus discourse mellifluously on *The Joys of Melancholy* and *Shadows of the Heart*, and all these literary pastimes gave scope for the further development of the Russian language towards the wonderful flexibility, musical perfection, and wealth in shades of feeling, which it soon

acquired in the hands of Pushkin. But naturally enough not a single work of creative genius emerged from the sugary sentimental mode, which, like the pseudo-classical one before it, can at best be regarded now as a training school of literary expression, strengthened by some elements of conventional classical idealism. The school served its purpose, and was first swept aside by the gay, exuberant, erotic verses of a group of young noblemen from the Lyceum of Tsarskoe Selo, the chief of whom was Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837). It soon dawned on the reading public that a fresh vital force was bursting into Russian literature at a time when its conscious divorce from real life had become most complete. And this new genius arose, not from a new quarter, but from the younger generation of that same sophisticated nobility which had plunged so recklessly into the arts and enlightenment of western Europe and wept over the misfortunes of Karamzin's *Poor Liza*.

On his father's side Pushkin was descended from an ancient aristocratic but no longer wealthy family. His mother was the granddaughter of Hannibal, the son of an Abyssinian chieftain—not, strictly speaking, a negro—brought from Constantinople to the court of Peter the Great, who befriended him; he eventually became a general. Pushkin was proud of his ancestry on both sides. He liked to explain his passionate sensuality by his African blood, and he gave a highly romanticized account of his great-grandfather's early life in his unfinished historical novel, *The Nigger of Peter the Great*.

The life of Pushkin's parents was conducted in that extravagant, worldly, cosmopolitan style current

among the most cultured Russian families of the late eighteenth century. From his father's excellent French library he passed to the Lyceum of Tsarskoe Selo, where he made several lifelong friends with tastes and enthusiasms similar to his own. All pupils graduating from this exclusive school were obliged to enter the public service, and Pushkin received a nominal appointment in the Foreign Office in 1817. He plunged at first with gusto and buoyancy into the fashionable life of St. Petersburg, where wine, new dishes, beautiful women, gambling, and duels formed the principal excitements. But the young officers in whose circle he moved drank champagne and liberalism in almost equally generous draughts, and a strong serious underrun of liberal humanitarian ideas preserved the spiritual balance of Pushkin and his friends. Their lack of interest in religion was rather a sign of sincerity than of levity, for organized religion was hopelessly compromised in their eyes, not only by its pandering to public ignorance and superstition, but also by its indulgence in political intrigues through the hypocritical clique of charlatans which surrounded Alexander I in his declining years.

The social life of St. Petersburg soon lost its glamour for Pushkin, and he realized he was wasting his energy there. He wrote in a poem, characteristic of his open and generous heart, addressed to his Lyceum friend the poet Delvig, comparing their lives at that time:

From our infancy the spirit of song burned in us,
And we knew a marvellous frenzy
But from my earliest years I loved applause.
You sang for the muses and for your soul.
I spent my gift, as I did my life, recklessly.
You educated your genius in quiet.

Meanwhile Pushkin had found time to write his first long narrative poem *Ruslan and Lyudmilla*, a romantic story of ancient Kiev, told with polished picturesqueness, humour, and detachment. But he also wrote political poems, including an *Ode on Freedom*, praising tyrannicide, and composed biting epigrams about Arakcheev, the Emperor's most hated adviser. Censorship, of course, made it impossible to publish such poems, but according to the custom of the time, they were eagerly passed from hand to hand in manuscript. As a result of these risky activities the Emperor exiled him to South Russia (1820). The change in itself was far from unwelcome to Pushkin, and it had an incalculably beneficial influence on his creative work. He often referred to the event later as a lucky escape from his distracting life in St. Petersburg.

His warm southern nature blossomed forth in the vivid scenery of the Caucasus and among the vineyards, bay-trees, and cypresses of the Crimea. Of his visit to General Rayevsky's estate near Yalta, he wrote: 'The happiest moments of my life were spent in the family of the venerable Rayevsky, a remnant of the age of Catherine, a monument of 1812, a man free from prejudices, with a strong character and, for all that sensitive . . . a carefree life in the midst of a charming family, a life I am so fond of and which I had never tasted—a happy southern sky, nature which satisfies the imagination, mountains, orchards, the sea. . . . There also I saw the fabulous ruins of the temple of Diana. Evidently mythological traditions are more propitious for me than historical associations; for here at last I was visited by rhymes.'

Pushkin was next stationed in Kishinev, only

annexed from Turkey in 1812, where he saw the darker sides of Eastern vice, corruption, and squalor. From there he was moved to Odessa on the staff of Count M. Vorontzov, Viceroy of Bessarabia, whose beautiful wife was one of the many women with whom Pushkin was destined to fall in love. She is said to have been the chief inspiration for the character of Tatiana in his greatest narrative poem *Evgeny Onegin*. This southern period ended for Pushkin in 1824, when he was removed from government service by imperial decree and ordered to live on his mother's estate at Mikhaylovskoe. His long poems *The Prisoner in the Caucasus* (1821), *The Fountain of Bakchisaray* (1822), and *The Gypsies* (1824) are the most notable of that time. A favourite literary controversy is the extent of Byron's influence on Pushkin. It is true that these colourful poems of Pushkin are akin in subject-matter to some of Byron's Oriental tales, but the resemblance goes little further. Byron's *The Corsair* and *The Bridge of Abydos* are painfully diffuse and melodramatic compared with the precise mellow flowing verses of Pushkin. He undoubtedly read and admired Byron, but he did not fall a victim to the prevalent craze for Byronic imitations, and Byron's was only one of many influences which Pushkin absorbed without being overwhelmed, and which were fuel to the flames of his creative genius. In fact the fashionable craze was based as much on admiration for Byron's personality as for his writings. The rebel aristocrat and Don Juan who finally gave his life in helping the Greeks to win their freedom from Turkish misrule could not fail to inspire both the liberal young noblemen of Russia and the cultivated young ladies

who were not satisfied with sighing over sentimental novels in country seclusion.

The most thoughtful of these Eastern poems of Pushkin, much more austere and intellectually suggestive than its predecessors, is *The Gypsies*, and since Dostoevsky proclaimed it to be the most national Russian poem, many writers have succumbed to the temptation of theorizing about it. It has a strong autobiographical element (like most of Pushkin's work), for he saw much of gipsies while he was in Bessarabia and became fascinated by their free roving life and firm customs. The hero of the poem is Aleko, a man of the world who, sick of civilization, joins a gipsy camp. He loves a gipsy girl, but she gets tired of him and deceives him with a young gipsy lover. One night Aleko finds them together and kills them both. Strangely enough, he is not punished, except by expulsion from the tribe. The old gipsy, father of the girl, tells him: 'We are savages and have no laws, but we will not live with a murderer. You were not born for a wild life. For yourself alone do you desire freedom. We are timid and kind at heart. You are cruel and bold—so better leave us.'

During Pushkin's quiet enforced residence in his mother's wooden manor-house he found his best friend in his aged nurse, who refused to accept the freedom from serfdom offered to her in recognition of her devoted service. He acknowledged that ~~she~~ owed to her his warm feeling for the Russian folk songs and stories on which he based his own fairy-tales. There is hardly any doubt that, had Pushkin been free to move, he would have joined the political rebels of December 1825, and shared their fate. In

his *Lines Sent to Siberia* he exhorted his friends to preserve their 'proud patience' in the depths of the Siberian mines. But soon afterwards Nicholas I summoned Pushkin to Moscow for an interview (1826). By granting him his liberty and promising to be his only censor the Emperor placed him in a position which was at once privileged and galling, for Pushkin was made to feel under special moral obligations to his sovereign.

When in 1831 he married a handsome but frivolously stupid young lady, thirteen years his junior, his social life in St. Petersburg made him increasingly unhappy, as did the constant petty interference of the government with his literary work, and the mean, carping, unsympathetic attitude of the younger generation of intellectuals and journalists who could not forgive him for his show of loyalty to the Emperor. The tone of Pushkin's literary work in these later years is stoically fatalistic, profoundly distrustful of 'public opinion', and thirsting for personal liberty and a more creative life. The following verses partly unveil this state of mind:

As leaden as the aftermath of wine
 Is the dead mirth of my delirious days,
 And as wine waxes strong with age, so weighs
 More heavily the past on my decline.
 My path is dim. The future's troubled sea
 Foretokens only grief and toil for me—
 But oh, my friends, I do not ask to die,
 I crave more life, more dreams, more agony.¹

In his *Elegy on the Portrait of Field-Marshal Barclay de Tolly in the Winter Palace*, Pushkin calls his contemporaries 'priests of the moment, votaries of success', and thus addresses the Marshal:

¹ Translated by Maurice Baring, *Lost Lectures*, 1931.

Unhappy chief! Alas your cup was full of gall,
Unto a foreign land you sacrificed your all,
The people could not brook your foreign-sounding name,
Pursued you with its yell and piled your head with shame.
How oft among you, men, a mighty one is seen
Whom the blind age pursues with insults mad and mean,
But, gazing on whose face, some future generation
Shall feel, as I do now, regret and admiration.¹

Pushkin's masterpiece *Evgeny Onegin* was written over a long period (1823-31). He described it himself as being a novel in verse, in the manner of Byron's *Don Juan*, with which it has certain superficial resemblances. Pushkin's verse at its best is so subtle in its apparent simplicity, so perfectly blended, that not a single word or syllable rings false or could be altered without damage to the music and the meaning. Therefore it is often murdered in translation, which is the main reason why it cannot be properly appreciated by those ignorant of the Russian language. *Evgeny Onegin*, in outline at least, has become more widely known, as also Pushkin's prose story *The Queen of Spades*, through their adaptation into opera form by Tchaikovsky. The story of Pushkin's masterpiece is straightforward but original, though the character-drawing, as in almost all Russian novels, is far more important than the plot. The hero, Evgeny Onegin, a young nobleman educated in all the European arts and graces, wearies of fashionable city life and retires to his country estate. He seeks distraction from his boredom by making friends with the only cultured neighbouring land-owner, a young man called Lensky, who has a passion for the latest German philosophy, literature,

¹ Translated by T. B. Shaw (Blackwood's Magazine, July-August 1845.)

and music. Onegin is amused by Lensky's romantic enthusiasm, and is introduced by him to the Laren, a family of provincial gentry. Lensky is engaged to Olga Laren, the eldest daughter, a charming, simple girl. Her more sensitive sister Tatiana falls passionately in love with Onegin, believing she has found in him the real hero of her dreams. She writes him a letter, confessing her love, but she only receives from him a reserved answer. Onegin is not such an unscrupulous cynic as to try to take any advantage of Tatiana's naïve confession, but he realizes that he cannot reciprocate such a genuine and pure feeling, and he tries to explain this to her without wounding her too much. He then foolishly flirts with her sister Olga in such a way that the impulsive and jealous Lensky challenges him to a duel. Lensky is killed, and Onegin leaves the district to seek forgetfulness in roaming the Caucasus. The easy-going Olga soon consoles herself for the loss of Lensky and marries a handsome cavalry officer. Tatiana, whose feelings go much deeper, still loves Onegin, even though she discovers that her ideas about his fine character were illusory. Finally, to please her family, she marries a wealthy prince. Onegin, drawn again to the social life of St. Petersburg, meets Tatiana at a ball, no longer the sweet provincial girl he had known, but a perfectly self-controlled great lady, who treats him with calm though polite indifference. This time he falls in love with her, and one day in despair seeks her out alone in her house. She tells him he should no longer pursue her, for he has come too late, and in these memorable words appeals to his conscience and reveals her own inward struggles:

'I was younger then, Onegin, and it seems to me I was better then. I loved you, and what was my reward? What did I find in your heart? Nothing but coldness. But do not think I blame you. In that awful hour you acted well and honourably. But to me, Onegin, this worldly glare, this tinsel blaze of an empty life, my triumphs and successes in the world . . . what do these mean to me? This minute I'd gladly exchange that whole masquerade for the old shelf of books, the wild garden, the poor humble village home, the spot where first I saw you, Onegin . . . For happiness was so conceivably possible, so nearly within our grasp. But my fate is now decided. Maybe I acted inconsiderately, but with tears and ardent prayers my mother entreated me, and for poor Tatiana all sacrifices were alike, I married. And now you must leave me, I implore you. I know that in your heart you own the stern claims of pride and honour. I love you, why should I pretend I do not? But I am given to another, and will for ever remain true to him.' Thus the story ends abruptly and on a tragic note. Apart from the limpid ease and perfectly concrete beauty of the verse, the sparkling wit and wisdom of the lighter passages and dialogue, Pushkin had created with real art what the critic Belinsky called 'true pictures of Russian life'. The basic contrast, between the roving, unstable Onegin, and the moral nobility of the truthful, strong-minded, yet charmingly feminine Tatiana, was pursued with variations throughout nineteenth-century Russian literature, and *Eugeny Onegin* has been rightly called the prototype of the psychological and social Russian novel.

Pushkin tried his versatile hand successfully in

almost every literary form, but it is generally agreed that his major drama, *Boris Godunov*, lacks the eternal quality of *Evgeny Onegin*, and of the great passages in his lyrical and narrative poems. Two of his shorter dramatic sketches, however, *The Stone Guest* and *Mozart and Salieri* rise to the high level of his best work. One of his last major poems, *The Bronze Horseman*, is exceptionally rich in suggestive imagery, and became the starting-point of a whole literature about St. Petersburg. Its subject was the great flood of 1824, when many of the poor people living in the low-lying suburbs of St. Petersburg were drowned or saw their homes destroyed. The two principal characters are the famous bronze statue of Peter the Great in the Senate Square, and the poor clerk Evgeny. In the flood the house occupied by Evgeny's sweetheart is washed away. Frantic with despair, he roves the streets, and at length finds himself facing the bronze statue of the Emperor. Recognizing in him the author of his misery, Evgeny is about to cry out, when the statue suddenly comes to life with a threatening gesture and starts to pursue him through the streets. His body is found later near the remains of his sweetheart's house. This poem was not passed by the Imperial censorship in Pushkin's lifetime, but was first published in 1841. Though the great builder-Emperor is warmly praised in the poem, it has usually been interpreted as a parable on the ruthless demonic character of the autocratic Russian Empire, coldly sacrificing the happiness of individual citizens to its insatiable passion for power.

Pushkin's prose has received less attention than it deserves; perhaps because he was so firmly labelled as

a poet. A number of his short stories are masterpieces, notably *Dubrovsky*, *The Captain's Daughter*, *The Queen of Spades*, *The Snowstorm*, and *The Young Lady as a Peasant Girl*. Each of these is alive with penetrating character sketches drawn through a narrative packed with incident, and the language, limpid, incisive, and harmonious, has Pushkin's magic touch. *The Captain's Daughter* was inspired by studies in the state archives for his history of the Pugachev¹ revolt. *Dubrovsky* gives an unforgettablely vivid picture of life in a Russian province. Dubrovsky is the son of a poor gentleman ruined by the spiteful vengeance of a wealthy neighbouring landowner (Troekurov), because of an absurd quarrel arising from the former's insufficient admiration for Troekurov's luxurious dog-kennels. The latter is a gluttonous boor, whose chief joy is in hunting, drunken parties, and brutal practical jokes (he would shut up his guests in a room with a bear to amuse himself by watching their alarm). His beautiful daughter is reminiscent of Tatiana and falls in love with Dubrovsky, who, having burned down his house rather than let it fall into the hands of his enemy, Troekurov, becomes a chivalrous brigand, a kind of Robin Hood, with a high price on his head. He spares his enemy only on account of his love for the daughter, Maria Kirilovna. Meanwhile her father betrothes her to an elderly prince, a highly cultured neighbouring landowner, who had built a house in classical English style and laid out a park in which grazed Swiss cows with tinkling bells on their necks. He showed his guests round the collection of pictures he had formed during his travels and

¹ Leader of a peasant revolt in the reign of Catherine II.

spoke about them to Maria Kirilovna, 'not in the artificial language of a pedantic connoisseur but with feeling and imagination'. A man more different to her father could hardly be conceived. She marries him, with respect but without affection, for she loves Dubrovsky. Soon afterwards Dubrovsky disbands his loyal company of brigands, and disappears from the neighbourhood.

In 1837 Pushkin was killed in a duel, brought about by the envious intrigue of his enemies, the irresponsible frivolity of his wife, and his own proud uncompromising nature. The moment he died all his papers were sealed by Zhukovsky,¹ acting under orders from Nicholas I. But his death caused immense public excitement and indignation, as if people suddenly awoke to realize how much they had lost. To avoid popular demonstrations, the Government arranged a secret funeral. The event roused Lermontov to write his lines on *The Death of a Poet*, in which he openly blamed 'the butchers of liberty, genius, and fame' for Pushkin's untimely end.

M. Lermontov (1814-41) was the son of a poor officer. His mother died when he was still an infant, and he was brought up in the country house of his wealthy maternal grandmother, who spared no pains in giving him the finest education available. He was attracted by Walter Scott, Goethe, Schiller, Heine, and Victor Hugo, but particularly by Byron, with whom he felt a deep spiritual affinity. He bitterly despised the society which surrounded him, men 'who crawl their way through life, without pride and without faith', but he lacked the initial

¹ V. Zhukovsky (1783-1852), Russian poet and pedagogue, who held a post in the Imperial household.

harmonious *joie de vivre* of the more buoyant Pushkin and the range of his understanding was narrower. He became possessed by an angry despair which made him oscillate between careless cynicism and acute melancholy. 'No, I am not Byron,' he wrote, 'I have been chosen as another; like him, a wanderer hunted through the world, but only with a Russian soul. I began young, will finish early, achieving little. On my heart, like in an ocean, lies a load of shattered hopes.'

As a result of his over-bold verses on Pushkin's death, he was exiled to the Caucasus, where, like Pushkin before him, he found inspiration for romantic poems in an Oriental setting. But Lermontov was no meek imitator, and he differed both from Pushkin and Byron in his deeper sense of loneliness, his firmer hatred of society, and in his absolute personal fatalism. With a moral ideal, which found no echo around him, he fixed his attention on his own generation in his own country, and was not afraid to face the painful conclusions which he reached: 'I survey sadly our generation and its future, either empty or dark. Meanwhile, laden with knowledge and doubt, it grows old and accomplishes nothing. Hardly out of the cradle, we are enriched by the mistakes of our fathers and by their wisdom after the event. Life already wearies us like a smooth path without a goal. Shamefully indifferent to good and evil, we fade away without a fight at the beginning of our course, timid in the face of danger, and contemptible slaves to power.' (*Meditation.*)

Lermontov's attitude to his contemporaries is most completely expressed in his novel *A Hero of our Times* (1840). Here, against a background of

luxuriant Caucasian scenery, he contrasts the simple and passionate characters of Azamat and Bela with the types of civilized Russian society, Princess Mary, Vera, and Pechorin. Somewhere in between comes the warm-hearted and resourceful Maxim Maximich, who has spent most of his life as a garrison officer in a Caucasian fortress, and in whom Lermontov portrays a sterling Russian nature, not perverted by prosperity or privilege. The story is little more than a loosely constructed setting for the skilful deployment of the main characters in a series of lively episodes. Lermontov stated frankly in his preface that the *Hero of our Times*, Pechorin, is a portrait, not of one man, but of all the vices of the period combined in their fullest development. He had diagnosed the illness, but how to cure it, God alone knows. The history of a human soul, he asserted, even of the meanest, is more interesting and useful than the history of a whole people—especially if it springs from the self-observation of a mature mind and is written without any vain ambitious desire to arouse sympathy or excite sensation. The autobiographical strain in this book becomes even more apparent through the detailed descriptions of Pechorin's physique and personality, which closely resemble the impression made by Lermontov himself on his contemporaries: 'He was of medium height, his straight, slim body and broad shoulders showed that he was strongly built. He could stand all the hardships of a nomadic life and of extreme climates. He had not yet been ruined by the usual city vices, nor by spiritual suffering.' Pechorin's eyes did not smile when he smiled. He had the strongest prejudice against all maimed people, the blind,

crooked, deaf, armless, hunchbacked, etc., feeling an indissoluble link between a person's exterior and his soul, as if the loss of a limb also deprived the soul of some important faculty of feeling. When he spoke the truth, no one believed him, so he started to master the tricks of deception. Unhappy and misunderstood in love, he learned to hate human beings. He ended in despair, not the kind which can be cured by a pistol shot, but a cold and impotent despair, concealed by a hypocritical mask of amiability and smiling mockery.

Lermontov as an artist has survived better than Byron. He carried on and vigorously developed part of Pushkin's tradition, but his gloomy, sardonic, self-centred heroes led it into a blind alley which amounted to spiritual suicide. His own frequently expressed premonitions of an early death came true when he was killed in a duel at the age of twenty-seven.

A. S. Griboyedov (1795-1829) a cultured diplomat and man of the world, who wrote one brilliant satirical comedy, *Woe from Wit*, depicted there the ugly, cynical and sordid life of the average Russian official, but it was left to Nicolas Gogol (1809-52) to explore the literary opportunities presented by the provincial landowners and the official classes with the same intensity and sureness of touch as Pushkin and Lermontov had pictured the rarer souls among the half-Europeanized nobility.

Gogol was the son of a poor family of minor gentry from the Ukraine. Having entered the teaching profession, he soon abandoned it for literature, and was greatly helped by the generous friendship of Pushkin. Deeply shocked by the news of Pushkin's

death, which reached him in Rome, while he was working on his novel *Dead Souls*, he wrote: 'All my joy, all the happiness of my life, lie buried in Pushkin's grave. I undertook nothing without having consulted him first. As for the present work, he was its inspiration and to him I owe the whole idea and plan.' Gogol had first aroused Pushkin's admiration by his early stories describing the legends and customs of his native Ukraine. The first collection of these was published under the title of *Evenings in a Farm-House near Dikanka*. They were followed by his vivid historical novel, *Taras Bulba*, reproducing the brutal and heroic energy of the Cossack warriors who fought against the Poles, and then by another volume of less legendary, more realistic Ukrainian stories. One of the most charming of these is *The Oldworld Landowners*, whose theme is the secluded monotonous life of a modest couple who are wholly devoted to each other, and who neither know nor need to know anything of the cares and excitements of the outside world beyond the boundaries of their small estate. The quiet humour of this story changes to tragedy, when Pulcheria Ivanovna (the wife) suddenly dies and her old husband, Afanasy Ivanovich, stricken by inconsolable grief, allows the house to fall to rack and ruin, only waiting for the moment, not long delayed, when, after hearing her voice calling him in the garden, he is able to follow his wife to the grave. The pettiest side of Russian provincial life is admirably brought out in *Ivan Ivanovich's Quarrel with Ivan Nikiforovich*, a story of how two lifelong friends become bitter enemies as a result of a trivial and senseless episode in which the one got angry and called the other a goose.

Gogol's later stories turn to life in St. Petersburg, the sadness of which he knew too well from his own experience as a struggling writer there. *The Overcoat* started a new genre in Russian literature. It is the story of a poor clerk who is endlessly teased and bullied by his colleagues and superiors. The repulsive underlying coarseness and brutality of these nominally educated and worldly people is brought to life in every detail of Gogol's description. The whole existence of this clerk consisted in copying papers. He had no other interests and no recreations. Only one ambition is born in his brain; he yearns to be the owner of a smart, warm, well-cut overcoat, to replace the miserable and threadbare garment in which he shivers. But to buy this overcoat he would have to save every kopeck, to give up drinking tea in the evening, to use no candles in his room and to tread very lightly when walking the streets, in order not to wear out his shoes. He set about it, and in so doing became for the first time a live human being, a man with self-respect and a purpose. The great day came; he put on his new overcoat; but that very night he was stopped by some hooligans on his way home, and his precious coat, his first joy in life, was stolen. Broken-hearted, he tries in vain to trace the thieves and recover his coat. He ends by invoking the help of a high official, a general, who only laughs at him. The clerk, Akakia Akakiavich, dies in lonely misery, but soon afterwards the town is startled by reports of how a wild criminal waylays senior officials at night and strips them of their cloaks. Finally this happens to that same heartless general who had insulted Akakia. Then the ghostly marauder vanishes; he has had his revenge.

Gogol's prose has little of the simplicity and directness of Pushkin's; it is involved, rhetorical, and often grotesque, with frequent digressions and moralizations. But he has an extraordinary gift of creating characters and a convincing atmosphere through his descriptive use of realistic details. In his play, *The Government Inspector* (1835) he was constrained by the restrictions of dialogue to make the best of this gift. It is surprising that such a scathing satire on contemporary local government ever passed the censor, but Gogol wrote at the time to his mother: 'All are in arms against me. Had it not been for the express interference of the Emperor, the play would never have been allowed on the stage, and even now there are some doing all they can to get it withdrawn by the censor.' The play is built round the alarm of a local prefect at the news that his superior may arrive at any moment from St. Petersburg on a tour of inspection, and that his own misdeeds may consequently be discovered. Never before in his career has he experienced such unwelcome zeal from the central authorities, but now 'Voltairian' reformers want to stop bribes and the arbitrary administration of justice. However, the prefect is such a cunning scoundrel, having thirty years' experience of cheating other scoundrels, that he hopes for the best. He tells the postmaster to open all letters passing through his office, and to keep him informed about any matter affecting the Government Inspector's arrival. Incidentally, it turns out that the postmaster has always opened letters, not for official reasons, but simply out of curiosity, and he used to keep the more entertaining ones in his desk to take out and read when he felt

particularly bored. A certain Chlestakov, a visitor who has run into debt at the local inn, and gambled away all his money, is believed to be the Government Inspector, travelling incognito. The prefect visits him, is delighted to have the opportunity of paying his bill, and to make sure of buying further favours, invites Chlestakov to stay in his house. He feels his success is complete when Chlestakov becomes engaged to his daughter. Gogol shows with uncanny insight how the hideous vulgarity and impudent pettiness of this official reach their culminating pitch in the moment of his greatest worldly triumph. The minor local dignitaries and shopkeepers, who had formerly complained about him to the supposed Inspector, hasten to him with presents and flattering speeches as soon as they hear that his daughter is engaged to such a great man. The prefect watches them with the gloating satisfaction that he has risen in the world and can thus afford to arrest, bribe, and blackmail even more freely than before. Unfortunately for him, his triumph is shattered by the discovery, through a letter intercepted by the obedient postmaster, that Chlestakov is in fact only an insignificant adventurer and impostor. To complete the prefect's appalling mortification, the arrival of the real Inspector is announced, and the play ends effectively on this top note of dramatic excitement.

Gogol himself described his comedy as observing life through laughter visible to the world and through tears invisible and unknown to it; and indeed *Inspector*, all the wit and gaiety of *The Government Inspector*, there runs a horrifying and desperate almost every character. Of the anger aroused by

those of his contemporaries who felt stung by his satire, Gogol wrote: 'They would have forgiven me if I had portrayed monsters, but they could not forgive a picture of plain vulgarity.'

The success of *The Government Inspector* eased Gogol's financial circumstances and enabled him to travel in Switzerland and Italy, where he wrote the greater part of *Dead Souls* (1842). There is much in this novel to hinder the reader of to-day from fully appreciating it, particularly the reader accustomed to the excitement and incident of sensational modern narrative. Nor has it any of the more compressed tautness of contemporary prose idiom. *Dead Souls* is long-winded, rhetorical, and shapeless, with little sense of development either in the persons described or in the story which connects them. It will always remain a superb literary document of the Russian provincial gentry of that period, but it becomes much more than that through the artistic genius which lights up in places the souls of this astonishing portrait gallery. The miser, Plyushkin, the dull-witted calculating Korobochka, the sentimental hypocrite, Manilov, have become eternal types like Shakspere's Shylock or Molière's Tartuffe. The story is little more than an ingenious device for bringing together these character studies through their varied behaviour in response to one and the same peculiarly puzzling situation. A certain Tchichikov, who has been sacked from the Customs service for dishonesty, plans to retrieve his fortune by visiting a number of neighbouring land-owners and buying from them the names of serfs who had died since the last census. An official revision of lists of serfs took place only once in ten

years, and the landlord had still to pay poll-tax for the serfs ('souls') who had died during that period. Tchichikov, by getting 'dead souls' transcribed to him for a small sum, is able to represent them as forming part of his own estate—which is in fact non-existent.

We know from Gogol's correspondence with his great friend the writer S. T. Aksakov, that he was cruelly tormented by his own inability to find redeeming qualities in his characters or to produce some positive constructive ideal on which to bring his novel to a more hopeful conclusion. He was struggling to do this in the second part of *Dead Souls*, but he suffered from fits of despair, in one of which he threw the manuscript into the fire and decided to abandon his work. The obligations of the Christian religion weighed increasingly on his mind, and he wore himself out with fasts and religious observances. In his last book, *Correspondence with Friends* (1843), he pleaded that Russia's hope lay in a more genuinely religious life, in austerity, self-sacrifice, and obedience to constituted authority. This apparent recantation of Gogol, who had stirred the sleeping conscience of many, who had proclaimed that the only sacred duty of the writer is to tell the truth, roused indignation and disappointment among his admirers. Belinsky wrote to him: 'Russia does not need sermons (she has heard enough), nor prayers (she has repeated enough), but an awakening in the people of the feeling of human dignity.' Gogol had none the less told the truth about Russia as he saw it, for he had seen it in two contrasting lights, one of occasionally beautiful, but most often hideous and fantastically comic, reality,

the other of pure religious demands which were stupidly unheeded or deliberately disobeyed; comparing Russia to a galloping *troika*,¹ he asked in wonder where was she heading for, but he left the answer to others. That positive principle of life, which Gogol had vainly sought in the stagnant marshes of provincial Russia, re-emerged soon afterwards in the developing conflict of ideals between Slavophils and Westernizers, which, in one shape or another, pervaded Russian literature till the twentieth century.

¹ Russian sledge or carriage drawn by three horses abreast.

III

FROM AKSAKOV TO TURGENEV

S. T. AKSAKOV (1791-1859), landowner, naturalist, and sportsman, born ten years before Gogol, was one of his staunchest friends and supporters. Gogol helped to open his eyes, and without him he would probably never have been able to see his own family history as a fascinating subject for artistic treatment. He started to write late in life, and the first part of his *Family Chronicle* only appeared in 1846, five years before Gogol's early death. Aksakov's work covered a past period, but in it was a slice of Russian life which had never before been so perfectly crystallized in literature, and which through his brilliant and intimate interpretation acquired a lasting significance for the future of the Slavophils (see Chapter I). Furthermore, his *Family Chronicle* (1856) and *Childhood Years of a Bagrov Grandchild* (1858), were the first of that unique series of vivid and sensitive personal memories of childhood (bringing back to life whole epochs), of that essentially Russian form of imaginative autobiography, in which L. Tolstoy, Gorky, and Garin-Mikhailovsky later excelled. Most striking after the tortuous and grotesque provincial characters of Gogol is the serene stability of Aksakov's strong patriarchal family. There is no trace of any gnawing spiritual conflict in this rural community, hardly a single jarring note of uneasy conscience or of latent social discord. The understanding between the members of the family and their peasants, unquestioned by doubt, is

sufficient to create the order, mutual respect, and discipline by virtue of which the large new estate is efficiently organized, a mill is built for the corn and virgin soil is put under the plough. No one protests against the benevolent tyranny of the old grandfather, which is exercised with rigour on his family as well as on his serfs. The following passage illustrates the setting of this singularly self-contained existence:

‘Grandfather greeted his wife kindly and called her Arisha; he never kissed her hand, but he gave her his hand to kiss as a token of his favour. Arina Vasilevna blossomed out and looked younger. Her obesity and clumsiness disappeared, as if by magic. She brought a little stool and seated herself in the porch near grandfather, which she never dared to do if he did not receive her graciously. . . . The village elder had seen the master, knew that he was in a good humour, and had passed the word round to the peasants. Some of them, who had some special requests, made use of the favourable opportunity, and they were all satisfied. Grandfather gave some more grain to a peasant who had not yet paid off his old debt, though he could have done so; he gave permission for another to marry off his son before the winter, and not to the girl previously selected by him; he agreed that a soldier’s guilty wife, whom he had ordered to be turned out of the village, should come to live with her father, and so on.’

The Childhood Years of a Bagrov Grandchild is full of subtle and truthful observation, recreating the world of this sensitive and precocious child

in the first eight years of his life. At the age of four he had a long and dangerous illness through which his mother assiduously nursed him to the detriment of her own health. She was a highly cultivated woman, not quite in harmony with the family of rough country squires into which she had married, but she devoted herself unsparingly to the welfare of her husband and children, especially of her son. Describing his convalescence in his parents' big wooden house at Ufa, Aksakov writes: 'The two nurseries in which I lived with my sister were covered with grey stucco, and their little windows looked out on the garden and on to the raspberry canes planted underneath, which grew so high that they spread right inside, thus delighting me and my inseparable companion, my dear little sister. . . . In spite of my delicate condition, the greatness and beauty of God's world imperceptibly imprinted itself on my childish soul, and I lived, without knowing it, in my imagination. I was constantly describing to my sister, like an experienced person, the various marvels which I had seen; she would listen with intent curiosity, fixing on me her beautiful eyes, full of strained attention, but clearly expressing at the same time, "Brother, darling, I don't understand a word". And was this surprising? The story-teller was just five years old, and his listener three. . . .' Aksakov explains how his terror of darkness and of dark rooms was enhanced by the strange fairy-tales and ghost stories told him by his nurse. He heard from her that in one of the disused rooms, formerly his grandfather's study, the dead man could sometimes be seen sitting at the desk, and sorting out his papers. He became so frightened

of this room that he always ran past it with his eyes closed. One day he forgot, looked into the room, and remembering his nurse's story, thought he saw an old man in a white nightshirt sitting there. He cried out, and fell down in a faint. When his mother returned she heard the whole account. 'She got very angry, ordered grandfather's study to be opened up, brought me there, trembling with fear, and forced me to see that there was nothing except some old linen hanging over a chair. She used every effort to convince me that such stories were nonsense and only invented by superstitious, ignorant people. She put my nurse in disgrace, and for several days she was not allowed to enter our nursery. But when she was banished to the servants' quarters, she stole her way through to the nursery at night, kissed us while we were asleep and wept. I saw all this myself, because once I was woken up by her caresses. She looked after us very zealously, but with incurable obstinacy and prejudice; she often failed to understand my mother's orders and surreptitiously defied them. . . . Every day I read aloud to my little sister my one and only book, *The Mirror of Virtue*, not realizing that she still understood nothing except the pleasure of looking at the illustrations. I then knew the whole book by heart, but now only two of the stories and pictures out of the whole hundred have survived in my memory—although they are not particularly striking—*The Grateful Lion* and *The Boy Who Dresses Himself*.' A little later on a kindly neighbour, with an excellent library of European books, who had heard about the young Aksakov's passion for reading, presented him with a substantial work in twenty parts,

entitled *A Child's Reader for Heart and Mind*. The boy devoured these volumes like one possessed, and his mother had to lock them up in a cupboard to prevent him from reading day and night. 'A complete upheaval took place in my mind and a new world opened before me... I learned about the formation of rain and the origin of snow. Many events in nature at which I had hitherto looked blankly, acquired a new meaning for me, and became still more interesting.'

S. T. Aksakov also wrote books on fishing, shooting birds, and hunting—of which Gogol once told him: 'Your birds and fish are more alive than my men and women.' He rewrote from memory *The Little Crimson Flower*, one of the longer stories so often repeated to him by his old nurse. It is a perfect fairy-tale of pure fantasy, distilling the wisdom, innocence, and charming simplicity of ancient Russian folklore. His literary and theatrical reminiscences are valuable chiefly for the light which they throw on contemporary intellectual life and on his very close relations with Gogol, whose complicated troubled nature found at times an oasis in the quiet, almost unclouded, happiness of Aksakov.

I. A. Goncharov (1812–91) stands on the border-line dividing the clear-cut, active, integrated characters of the stable patriarchal régime from the idealistic, conscience-stricken, unhappy noblemen of the 'forties. Goncharov's parents were of the wealthy merchant class, but he was brought up as a member of the landed nobility. After studying at Moscow University he entered the state service and remained in it for most of his life. Of his three successive novels, *An Ordinary Story* (1847), *Oblomov* (1858), and *The Precipice* (1869), only the second is

a work of genius and has earned for its author a unique place in world literature. Temperamentally Oblomov belonged to the more static provincial nobility; but mentally he was uneasily conscious of the stirrings of purposive change in the air, and he cherished a plan (which, of course, never materialized) to improve his neglected estate and the condition of his serfs. The description of his character, and of the subsidiary ones around him, is so rich in literary art, so deeply penetrating in its significance for Russian social history, that it deserves more than cursory attention. Oblomov, after a brief period of Government service, had abandoned the effort of appearing regularly in an office, and spent his entire time lying at home in his dressing-gown. 'His attitude and the very folds of his dressing-gown expressed the same untroubled ease as his face. . . . A serene, open, candid mind was reflected in his eyes, his smile, in every movement of his head and his hands. . . . If his mind was troubled, his eyes were clouded, his forehead wrinkled, and an interplay of hesitation, sadness, and fear was reflected in his face, but the disturbance seldom took the form of a definite idea and still more seldom reached the point of a decision. It merely found expression in a sigh and died down in apathy or drowsiness.'¹ His active German friend, Stolz, had brought him books to read, but serious reading tired him. History merely reduced him to misery. 'One learned that years of calamity had come, that man was unhappy; now he mustered his forces, worked, took infinite trouble, endured incredible hardships labouring for the sake of better days—Here they came at

¹ Translated by Natalie Duddington, 1929. (Allen & Unwin.)

last—one would think that history might take a rest; but no, clouds appeared again, the whole structure fell down, man had again to work and toil.'

Zahar, Oblomov's body-servant, though devoted to his master, was always grumbling and watching for a chance to cheat him in small matters. He was dirty, very clumsy, and an incorrigible liar. He never did more work than was absolutely necessary, and when he swept his master's room—by no means every day—he would leave the corners untouched, sweeping only the middle.

After eight years of life like this, Oblomov is suddenly faced with two troubles ('two misfortunes at once, how can one stand it?'); his landlord tells him he must move from the flat, and he receives a disturbing letter from the bailiff of his estate. Zahar ventures to suggest that if other people can move to a new flat, so can he and his master. This remark provokes a startling scene. 'Other people,' Oblomov repeated; 'those whom you mean are God-forsaken wretches, rough, uncultured people who live in some attic in dirt and poverty. They can sleep quite comfortably on a mat, somewhere in a yard. All that is nothing to them. Poverty drives them from pillar to post. They might be ready enough to move to new lodgings, I dare say. They are people who clean their own boots, dress themselves . . . they think nothing of stirring the wood in the stove or of dusting . . .'

'Lots of Germans are like that,' remarked Zahar gloomily.

'Exactly—and I? Do you imagine I am like that?'

'You are quite different!' Zahar said piteously, still failing to grasp what his master was driving at.

'Comparing me to other people!' Oblomov went on. 'Why, do I rush about or work? Don't I eat enough? Do I look thin and wretched? Do I go short of things? I should hope I have someone to wait on me and do things for me. Thank heaven I've never in my life put on my stockings myself. And to whom am I saying this? Haven't you looked after me since I was a child? You know all this; you have seen that I have been brought up tenderly, and have never suffered from cold, hunger, or poverty, have never earned my living or done any dirty work. So how could you bring yourself to compare me with other people? Do you imagine I have health like theirs and can do and endure what they can?'

In contrast to this picture of the mutual demoralization of a master and his serf, there is a positive character in the shape of Oblomov's lifelong friend, Stolz, a Russified German businessman. He had everything which Oblomov lacked. He was all bone and muscle. Just as nothing was excessive in his physique, so in his mental activities he aimed at a precise balance between the practical side of life and the finer claims of the spirit. 'The two sides ran parallel with each other, twisting and twining on the way, but never becoming entangled in heavy, hopeless knots. He lived according to a fixed plan and tried to account for every day as for every rouble. . . . There was no room in his soul for dreams, enigmas, and mysteries.'

Stolz was a loyal friend and tried one means after another to rouse Oblomov from his apathy. At last something really stirred him. Stolz introduced him to the beautiful Olga, and he fell in love with her. But his radiant dreams of future happiness were

last long, for she is rendered even more repulsive to Kalinovich by the continued love, now tinged with bitter regret, which he cannot help feeling for Nastya. However, ten years after his business deal in marriage, Kalinovich realizes some of the expected profits of his ambition by becoming a state councillor. He has no other satisfaction, except, when on seeing Nastya again, he suddenly feels that years of moral torment are not too high a price to pay for a moment of such intense happiness. Kalinovich consciously considered that his cruel behaviour in rejecting Nastya, and his cold, calculating marriage to the general's daughter were the only two base actions of which he had ever been guilty. He was determined to live down these actions by exemplary behaviour in his career, and he became the terror of his colleagues for his incorruptibility, ruthless partiality, and industry. But more and more people with shady vested interests of various kinds turned against him as a dangerous reformer, and finally, after rising to be governor of a province, he was disgraced and removed from his post by the successful intrigues of his enemies. His wife also left him; only Nastya remained faithful in spite of everything. When he is morally broken, physically ill, and ostracized by public shame, she marries him without a moment's hesitation.

Among the minor characters there is the admirable housekeeper who worked for Nastya's father, but with the greatest embarrassment be persuaded a wage of 120 roubles a year, since she still owed to the master who had saved her from poverty by engaging her to look after his house. This is unlike other novels of the period in its

abundant incident, *A Thousand Souls* is true to the Russian tradition in its emphasis on the moral problems of its characters. But the figure of the *raznochinet*, ('man of mixed ranks') Kalinovich, introduced something new into Russian literature. While the pathetic petty officials of Gogol were morally crushed from the start, Pisemsky's hero was a strong and intelligent character who fought his way into the highest ranks of officialdom, using dishonest means, the only ones he found open to him, to get what he wanted. He became scrupulously honest as soon as he could afford to be, only to find then that his reforming zeal undermined his career and ironically robbed him of the fruits of success just at the moment they were within his grasp.

N. Nekrasov (1827-72) had a great influence on his contemporaries as a civic patriotic poet. He combined in his own social origin the penitent idealistic nobleman of the 'forties and the emerging 'commoner' with an aroused self-respect. He was himself the son of a nobleman who had retired from the army to settle on his country estate, where he acted as local commissioner of police. Here Nekrasov witnessed, as a child, scenes of cruel extortion from the peasants. As his poetry shows, he was haunted by these memories of childhood:

Once more I behold the familiar places,
Where the days of my fathers, barren and reckless,
Were passed in riot and petty tyranny,
Where the herd of oppressed and trembling slaves
Envied the freer life of the dog and the horse,
Where I soon learned the lesson of patience and hate.

Unlike the more theoretical liberals, he did not write of the peasant as an outsider. His father

had completely cut him off when he refused to adopt a military career, and he sank to the lowest depths of poverty and hunger. His poetry, with all its limitations of theme, and its occasionally blatant pamphleteering, is deeply truthful and sincere, and was drawn from the bitterest personal experience. The range of his influence on progressive thought was more widely extended when he became editor of the influential periodical *The Contemporary* and later of *Fatherland Annals*; it was largely due to his discriminating and energetic support that Dostoevsky's first novel, *Poor People*, was published and achieved immediate success. At the time of his death he was still working on his most celebrated major poem, *Who Can Live Happily in Russia?* which remained unfinished. In this poem seven peasants get involved in an endless argument as to who has the best life—the country gentleman, the official, the priest, the merchant, or the Tsar. Finally they set out on a pilgrimage to different parts of the Russian Empire to find out the answer to the question by seeing for themselves. Nekrasov has sometimes been regarded as a forerunner of the populists, but he was much soberer, harsher, and less sanguine than they were; he did not shrink from describing Russian peasant life in all its brutal squalor, and though he hailed the liberation of the serfs (1861) as a great landmark, he remained apprehensive. 'The people have been freed, but is the people happy?' While keeping his faith in their endless capacity for endurance, he was disappointed to see no striking improvement in their lot during the following decade.

D. Grigorovich (1822-1900) was one of the first

landowner-novelists to write mainly about the peasantry, but without the caustic scepticism and bitterness of Nekrasov. He was very much a man of the 'forties, impregnated with that chivalrous idealism, doomed to disappointment, which distinguished the generation of Turgenev. His novel, *Anton Goremyka* (1847) found an outlet for these feelings in a warm-hearted, sympathetic picture of the peasant, and, by the sensation which it created, fortified the moral incentive leading to the abolition of serfdom.

I. S. Turgenev (1818-83) was the son of a retired cavalry officer, who had married for money an heiress many years older than himself. The atmosphere of his parents' married life is recreated in Turgenev's story, *First Love*. His mother was a domestic tyrant, who personified for him the arbitrary and erratic qualities of the old-fashioned landowning class. He escaped from his bondage to her by travelling abroad as soon as he could, and with a small band of kindred spirits, among whom was Bakunin (later the celebrated revolutionary anarchist and rival of Marx), he plunged enthusiastically into the study of Hegel at Berlin University. 'I threw myself,' he wrote, 'into the German ocean which was to purify and regenerate me, and when at last I emerged from these waters, I found myself a Westernizer, and so I have always remained.' Turgenev found in Europe what was then most lacking in Russia, some sense of purpose, a feeling for personal dignity, an understanding of proportion and differentiation, and he became convinced of the superiority of European culture, of Russia's need to absorb it, and of her capacity to do so without losing

her own identity. His sobering experience of German-inspired doctrinaires and his awareness of the infinite complications of human nature made him a sceptic on many issues, but his European training and self-discipline saved him from excesses.

After two years in Berlin, Turgenev returned to Russia and took his degree at Moscow University (1840). He started to publish verse, which was praised by Belinsky, but has no lasting interest. In 1845 he first met the French singer and actress, Pauline Garcia (Mme Viardot) and remained in love with her for the rest of his life. After quarrelling with his mother, who violently disapproved of his attachment to Pauline Viardot, and of his retirement from the government service, he spent some years in comparative poverty. This came to an end in 1848, when his mother died, leaving him a considerable property with 2,000 serfs. His *Sportsman's Sketches*, which started to appear in 1846, established his reputation. They contained something of everything which was then sought after and expected in good literature, fascinating character sketches of Russian peasants and landowners, an intimate feeling for nature, and an anti-serfdom trend all the more effective for being so unobtrusive. The sketches were read with particular avidity because they appeared in that most repressive period of Imperial absolutism which lasted from 1848 (the year of the abortive European revolutions) till 1855 (the death of Nicholas I). When Gogol died in 1852, Turgenev wrote an article praising him as a great social satirist. For this he was first arrested, then banished to his country estate, where he was kept for eighteen months under supervision. In 1855 the shameful

Crimean War and the reign of the autocratic Nicholas I both came to an end, and the following year saw the publication of Turgenev's first long novel, *Rudin*.

The character of Rudin is thought to have been based on Bakunin (Turgenev's fellow-student in Berlin), and the novel, like the bulk of Turgenev's work, has great documentary as well as aesthetic interest. Rudin is the perfect talker of the 'forties, a fiery idealist with all the refinements of a Western education, but without strength of character or power of action, though capable of inspiring enthusiasm in others. He makes false promises; he borrows money from friends and forgets to return it; he imagines he is in love with the daughter of his hostess, but the moment he is confronted with her genuine love for him, he beats a cowardly retreat. This young provincial girl, Natalya, not particularly brilliant or beautiful, is one of the memorable heroines in Turgenev's portrait gallery, who by their resolution and identification of words with deeds always overshadowed the unstable well-intentioned men with whom they are linked. In his lecture, 'Hamlet and Don Quixote' (1860) Turgenev saw these same types in the Russia of his day faced with the dilemma that for action we require both thought and will, but 'thought and will have parted from each other and separate every day more and more'. Nekrasov told Turgenev privately that his Rudin, though highly original, was boring. In life he would certainly be regarded as a recognizable and recurrent kind of bore, but Turgenev is scrupulously fair to his own literary characters, seeing them as a complex whole and as human beings. The truth about Rudin

is summed up by his friend, the landowner, Lejnyov, 'Talent he certainly has . . . but character . . . that is the whole trouble, he has none of his own. . . . But enough—I want to speak of what is good and rare in him. He has enthusiasm, and, believe me, that is the most precious quality in our times. We have all become insufferably reasonable, indifferent, and lazy. We are asleep and cold. Thanks be to anyone who even for a moment wakes us up and warms us. Coldness is in his blood—through no fault of his own—but it is not in his head. He is no actor, as I once called him; he lives on other people's accounts, not like an adventurer, but like a child. He will never do anything definite on his own, because he has no vital force, no fire in the blood; but who can rightly say he has not been of use, that his words have not scattered good seeds in young hearts, to whom nature has not denied, as she has to him, the power of executing their intentions? For us one false note in a man's eloquence and the whole harmony is spoiled, but a young man's ear—happily—is not so highly developed, so pampered. If the sense of what he hears seems good to him, what does it matter about the tone?' Lejnyov might have included young ladies in his analysis, for Natalya Alekseyevna, who succumbed to the spell of Rudin's eloquence, both suffered and benefited from it. Her admiration for him, fostered by the soaring images which his words evoked, turned by degrees into love. Here is a scene between them, just before the denouement in their relations.

'Look,' said Rudin, and pointed through the window, 'you see that apple-tree, its branches have broken from the weight and quantity of their own fruit. A true emblem of genius.'

'They have broken, because they had no support,' rejoined Natalya.

'I understand you, Natalya Alekseyevna, but it is not so easy for a man to find that support.'

'It seems to me, the sympathy of others, at least that a man's loneliness . . .' Natalya became confused and blushed.

Rudin proved unequal to the situation, and after he had lost Natalya, wandered over Russia for some years, entering more and more desperately into various unsuccessful projects, including one for diverting the course of a river. He met his death deliberately in a minor street skirmish in Paris during the 1848 revolt.

Turgenev's next novel, *A Nobleman's Nest* (1858), was enthusiastically acclaimed by the Russian public. The least topical, but perhaps the most intimate of all his works, it summed up the personal history of a family of Russian landowners. Lavretsky, the principal character, is rich, intelligent and generous, but his life had been ruined when, as a naïve youth, he was lured into marriage by an attractive adventuress, who afterwards abandoned him, to pursue her own affairs in Paris. Meanwhile he starts to love the gentle and modest Liza, and one day, seeing in a newspaper a report of his wife's death in Paris, he believes that he is free again. His joy is short-lived, and he is brought back to earth with a rude shock when his wife suddenly reappears in his house, complete with a supercilious French maid and a lisping baby girl. His wife's feigned repentance and capacity for making pathetic scenes only excite a gloomy nausea in Lavretsky. Nothing daunted, Varvara Pavlovna

goes off to canvass the support of her husband's distant relative, Liza's mother.

"With quick, nearly noiseless steps she approached Maria Dimitrievna, and not giving her time to rise, almost fell on her knees in front of her. "How can I thank you enough, my aunt," she began, in a quiet but tense voice, "I hardly expected so much understanding from you; you are so good, you are an angel." As she was speaking Varvara Pavlovna unexpectedly seized Maria Dimitrievna's hand, and gently pressing it between her pale mauve gloves, raised it to her full and rosy lips. Maria Dimitrievna quite lost her self-possession, seeing such a beautiful and smartly dressed woman almost prostrate at her feet. She wanted to disengage her hand, make her sit down and say something kind to her. She ended by drawing Varvara Pavlovna towards her and kissing her smooth perfumed forehead. Varvara Pavlovna seemed quite overwhelmed with emotion.

"How do you do, good morning," said Maria Dimitrievna; "of course I never imagined . . . indeed, I am glad to see you. You understand, my dear, it is not for me to judge between husband and wife . . ."

"My husband is entirely in the right," sighed Varvara Pavlovna. "I alone am guilty."

A little later Liza entered the room. Varvara Pavlovna approached her, and Liza forced herself to smile. 'Allow me to introduce myself,' she exclaimed in a wheedling tone. 'Your mother is so kind to me, and so I hope you, too, will be good.' The expression of Varvara Pavlovna's face as she said this last word, her cunning smile, her cold and yet caressing look, the movement of her hands and

shoulders, her dress, her whole being—roused such a feeling of utter repulsion in Liza that she could not answer a single word, but making a great effort she held out her hand. 'This young lady despises me,' thought Varvara Pavlovna, squeezing strongly Liza's cold fingers, and turning towards Maria Dimitrievna, she murmured softly: '*Mais elle est délicieuse!*'

There are few more striking pictures in Turgenev's work than this glaring and irreconcilable contrast between Lavretsky's wife and Liza, and he certainly showed as great a mastery in portraying the hard character of the adventuress as in evoking the soul of the modest heroine. Liza ends by burying herself in a convent, and Lavretsky does not try to stop her. His wife soon tires of the monotonous life in Russia, and having extracted more money from her husband, departs and settles again in Paris. Lavretsky ceased to think about the possibility of his own happiness, but he became a conscientious landlord and did what he could for his peasants. The last scene in the book shows Lavretsky revisiting, after eight years, the house where Liza had lived. The old people have all died, and the house is inhabited by a young crowd who greet Lavretsky uproariously, 'not because all these young people were particularly pleased to see a distant and almost forgotten relative, but simply because they were ready to shout and enjoy themselves on any suitable pretext'.

Though much had changed, he found many memories of Liza intact, and in the garden was still the wooden bench, now blackened and warped, on which he had sat with her for a few happy moments. 'His heart was sad, but no longer heavy or dis-

tressed; he had much to regret and pity, but nothing of which he need feel ashamed. "Play, enjoy yourselves, grow up, you strong young people," he thought, and his thoughts were without bitterness; "your life is in front of you, and it will be easier. You will not need, like us, to search for your own path, to struggle, to fall down and rise again still surrounded by gloom."

In his next novel, *On the Eve* (1860), Turgenev dealt with the more topical and social effects of the idealism of the 'forties, and its outlets in political action. The permanent evils of Russian society had been in turn patiently endured, honestly recognized, and vigorously mocked at, but without any obvious improvement being achieved. There was a renewed craving for strong and limited characters rather than intelligent and imaginative ones, not for the tragically strong and superior men, like Lermontov's Pechorin, who despised or despaired of their fellow-creatures and could not be bothered with daily trivialities, but for the more practical type of leaders whose clearer purpose included getting something done for their less fortunate compatriots. These strong people Turgenev found in the Bulgarian revolutionary, Insarov, and his Russian wife, Helena; but their field of activity lay outside Russia, and the hero was significantly not Russian. Strength of character, will power, solid efficiency, were assuming such importance that every other quality—even love—must take second place. "How can one live without love? But who is there to love?" exclaimed Helena. When her thoroughly conventional parents were trying to marry her off to a prosperous government official, she wrote to Insarov:

'There is iron in him, but there is also stupidity, emptiness, and honesty. They say, he is very honest. You are also a man of iron, but not in the way he is. He may be self-confident, industrious, capable of self-sacrifice (you see, I am unprejudiced), but he is a thorough despot. It would be a disaster to fall into his hands.' From the literary point of view, Insarov, curiously incomplete, is not one of Turgenev's successful characters, but he is more convincing as seen through the eyes of his wife than as an independent agent. Insarov died of fever in Venice before he could return to his beloved country to help his friends in fighting the Turks. His wife's last letter to her parents shows that his power of influencing her life is just as strong after his death as before it. 'You will not see me again,' she writes, 'yesterday Dmitri died. I have no other country now except his country. There his people are preparing for war; I shall go to them as a nurse and look after the sick and wounded. I do not know what will happen to me, but even after Dmitri's death I remain true to his memory, to his life's work. I have learned Bulgarian and Serbian. Perhaps I shall never stand all this—so much the better.'

Turgenev's most famous man of action, Bazarov, the strong, silent hero of *Fathers and Sons* (1862), is, as a more concrete and many-sided character, a considerable improvement on Insarov. But the senseless storm of criticism which burst over Turgenev's head on account of this novel made him want to abandon writing altogether. For the democratic circles Bazarov seemed a caricature of progressive youth, and for the more conservative

nobility he was a dangerously sympathetic portrait of a 'nihilist'. *Fathers and Sons*, with its subtle characterization of Russians at home, was followed by *Smoke* (1867), a brilliant but unequal novel, which shows Russians chiefly as émigrés or wanderers in Germany. The fascinating and evil Irina is a variation of Varvara Pavlovna of *A Nobleman's Nest*. Her chief victim, Litvinov, escapes from her spell and wins back his pure Tatyana, thus providing one of the few conventionally happy endings to any story by Turgenev. The background is drawn from the author's own prolonged residence in Baden-Baden with the Viardot family. After the fall of Napoleon III (1870), Turgenev left Baden-Baden, and finally settled in Paris with the Viardots, only occasionally returning to Russia as a visitor.

His last long novel, *Virgin Soil*, was published in 1877. It was said to be a response to Dostoevsky's *The Possessed*, and it gives one human version of the populist movement, its purpose and the causes of its failure. Nejdanov, a young adherent, finds that he does not really believe in the movement he is serving, nor love the woman who has left everything else for his sake. He feels that step by step he is forfeiting her esteem and losing his own self-confidence. One day when he is preaching his doctrines in a village inn, the peasants, who are sardonically unimpressed, make him dead drunk, and he is carried home in a stupor. He remains too proud to abandon the cause altogether, but generous enough to want to give his Marianna freedom to marry another man, having seen that his friend, the factory-manager Solomin, a stronger and more balanced character than himself, undoubtedly loves her. The only satisfactory solution

he can find is to shoot himself. Another more practical populist, the landowner Marlekov, tries to stir up his own peasants and thereby meets with an ironic fate. 'A sincere straightforward man, with a passionate and unhappy nature,' he could in certain situations become pitiless, bloodthirsty, and deserve to be called a monster—yet he could at the same time sacrifice himself without a moment's hesitation and without a thought of reward.' He is one day seized by his suspicious villagers, and thus ignominiously handed over by them to the police. Many critics of this novel accused Turgenev, a voluntary exile, of being too much out of touch with the events and persons he was trying to describe in his own country, and echoes of the *Fathers and Sons* controversy were roused again. But his international reputation was already consolidated. In 1878 he was elected Vice-President of the International Congress of Writers in Paris, and Oxford University conferred on him an honorary doctorate of law. On his last visit to St. Petersburg he was fêted like a popular hero. Nevertheless, he wrote of this experience without illusions: 'I know they are not honouring me, but using me as a stick with which to beat the Government. Let them do so.'

Turgenev was singularly free from self-deception, complacency, or provincial narrowness, and much of his melancholy—which is far from being fundamental pessimism—arose from his courageous clear-sightedness, though it is easy to assume that his own unrequited devotion to Mme Viardot was reflected in many of the personal problems arising in his literary work. His intellectual honesty made him contemplative, and in steering clear of all parties and

cliques, he irritated those of his contemporaries who looked to literature for plain political lessons. As a thorough and exacting artist, devoted to his work, his refusal to identify or even associate himself with such organizations, is highly characteristic. 'An intellectual clique is the ruin of every individual development,' he wrote in his *Hamlet of the Shchigrov District* (Sportsman's Sketches). 'It is an ugly substitute for real society, for a woman, for life itself; it is a lazy and sluggish living together or alongside each other, treated as if it were something of serious importance; a clique substitutes pronouncements for free conversation, encourages fruitless chatter, distracts you from lonely creative work, and infects you with a literary itch; it ends by depriving you of fresh and virgin spiritual strength. A clique—well, it is something vulgar and boring which strikes a pose of brotherhood and friendship; it is a long series of misunderstandings and pretensions under a pretext of frankness and sympathy; in a clique, thanks to the claims of every member to poke his unwashed hands right inside his friend, not a single pure untouched place is left in the heart.'

A Russian critic wrote of Turgenev that if he had to sum up the outlook of the great writer, he would call him a humanist, rather than a liberal or a Westernizer. His unselfish but somewhat undiscriminating generosity and his warm power of sympathy were testified to by many of his contemporaries. In Paris he was hemmed in by Russian visitors, young writers or emigrants, whom he patiently helped both with money and sensible advice. He had none of that petty calculation or bitter competitive jealousy so often shown by minor

or even major artists to their professional colleagues. He always recognized Tolstoy as greater than himself, and to rising young writers like Garshin and Leontiev he gave help and encouragement. He was genuinely grieved when Tolstoy buried himself in bibles and religious commentaries, apparently abandoning creative work, and during his last illness, shortly before his death, he wrote in a letter to Tolstoy: 'I write to tell you how happy I am to have been your contemporary and to express to you my last urgent prayer. My friend, return to your literary work. I clasp you once more to my heart, you and all the others.'

Turgenev's humanism never sinks into a sloppy humanitarianism and his work is tinged with mellow irony, though in his treatment of human love he has sometimes been called a mystic, owing to an indefinable religious element rooted in his otherwise sceptical nature. This quality emerges powerfully in one of his last stories, *Klara Milich*. It is an outwardly simple but uncanny story of a young actress who dies on account of her love for a young student whom she has met only once, and then only to be driven to despair by his cold indifference. After her death this young man, Aratov, who had hardly thought about her previously, began to feel her presence more and more strongly. He realized that it was gradually gripping him, and that he was falling under the power of another life, of another distinct personality. He was not at first in love with Klara; indeed, how could he fall in love with a dead woman, who had meant little enough to him even when she was alive? But he was already in her power; he plainly did not belong to himself any more. He not

only felt her presence, he heard her voice and saw her face, gazing at him with reproachful eyes. As this strange communion between dead and living grows more intense, Aratov falls feverishly ill, and he dies in a happy delirium. The reader is left wondering whether all this experience is grim reality or a form of hallucination, whether Aratov has grown to love Klara, or is only passively submitting to something in which he now believes, that love is stronger than death and stronger than the fear of death.

Turgenev has been admired most of all for his artistic mastery of the Russian language; his foreign education never lured him, any more than it did Pushkin, from the pursuit of increasing perfection in his native instrument of expression. 'In days of doubt, in days of painful thought about the fate of my country, you alone help and support me, oh great, powerful, truthful and free Russian tongue. Were it not for you, how could I escape despair, seeing all that is happening in my country? But I cannot fail to believe that such a language can only have been given to a great people.' (*Poems in Prose*.) Turgenev's prose is rich, supremely supple and melodious, but part of its mastery lies in his unfailing awareness of the limits of all verbal expression. Always avoiding the rhetorical or exaggerated twist, its taut reserve is charged with emotional atmosphere, and it has the power to evoke feelings far beyond what it describes or analyses. It has no purple patches or sudden bursts of dramatic dialogue. Melchior de Vogué, who did so much for the appreciation of Russian literature in France, compared Turgenev's language to the

course of a great Russian river, 'carrying floating flowers and wafting fugitive scents, with luminous pools, long mirages reflecting sky and country, then suddenly disappearing in the dark shadows of a forest'. Turgenev's style sometimes caricatures itself in languid romantic clichés, but on the whole it rings true to the substance of his work, for he was never interested in displays of virtuosity or in style for its own sake except as an obedient instrument of meaning. As a fully conscious, widely travelled, and acutely observant interpreter of a mature but precarious civilization, he remains the most harmoniously cosmopolitan of the great Russian novelists, and, after Tolstoy, the most perfect literary artist.

IV

CRITICS AND THINKERS

WE have seen that during the first half of the nineteenth century a lively conflict of ideals between Slavophils and Westernizers started to dominate the outlook of the greatest Russian writers. Some of these imaginative writers branched off into critical and philosophic thought, while on the other hand eminent publicists like Herzen and Chernyshevsky launched into a kind of discursive imaginative literature and wrote novels. A brief review of the development of ideas by leading members of the Russian intelligentsia during this period till the advent of Marxism helps to render more distinct a number of features which shaped the fluctuating background of Russian literature.

P. A. Chaadayev (1793–1856) was a wealthy and brilliant guards officer, who suddenly incurred the displeasure of Alexander I, and went into retirement. He gave vent to his bitter thoughts in a series of 'Philosophical Letters', which diagnosed the ills of Russian society. 'Look around,' he wrote, 'everything is in motion, we are all like wanderers, not one of us has a definite sphere of existence; everything flows past us without leaving any permanent trace either on our surroundings or on ourselves. At home we live as if we were in lodgings, like strangers in the midst of our families; we merely camp in our towns, even more fleetingly than the nomad tribes moving across our steppes, for these tribes are more deeply attached to their barren spaces than we are

to our towns. In all peoples there are periods of powerful passionate activity, periods of youthful development, when their poetry, creative ideas, and happiest memories arise, the source and foundation of their subsequent history. . . . We have nothing of the kind. We began with the wildest barbarism, followed by crude superstition; then came the cruel humiliating rule of the Tartar conquerors, whose traces have not yet vanished from our mode of life. That is the painful history of our youth. . . . We have no enchanting memories, no strong edifying lessons in our national tradition. . . . We are involuntary wanderers on the broad high road of history, and the intelligent life of the West is not for us.' Chaadayev frankly asks, what can Russia substitute for the European ideas of duty, law, truth, and order? He answers that Russia can substitute nothing. 'Even the best ideas, through lack of co-ordination and consistency, get muddled up in our brains, like empty ghosts.'

Chaadayev's utterances were those of a clear-sighted patriot who refused to be lulled by any self-satisfaction about Russia's well-being and external prestige after the defeat of Napoleon. His personal spleen against the government can be discounted, and though his negative analysis sounds rather funereal, it served as a Russian starting-point for Belinsky's assimilation of German philosophy and his application of it to Russia's needs.

V. Belinsky (1811-48) was the son of a poor provincial doctor, a struggling commoner among the still predominantly aristocratic devotees of literature in the 'forties. His tremendous enthusiasm and persistent mental effort enabled him to become the

most respected and influential journalist of his day. Having spent some years spiritually entangled in Hegel's 'unearthly ballet of bloodless categories', he came down to earth and discovered 'reality' in the Russian life around him. His renewed concrete approach to ideas, and the influence which he wielded, caused philosophical and historical criticism in Russia to be largely replaced by social criticism, which was much more appropriate and salutary for most Russian readers. Literature began to be regarded as a means of inspiring life with principles of conduct, for Belinsky's literary criticism gradually enshrined social usefulness in the broadest sense as the highest criterion of literary merit. Social perfectibility remained, however, subordinate to personal development. 'For me, the human personality is higher than history, than society, than mankind itself,' wrote Belinsky—though he foolishly found fault with Pushkin's artistic genius for insufficient 'analysis' of 'the troubled spirit of the age'.

The essence of Belinsky's view about the social responsibilities of literature appears in a passage of his furious letter to Gogol, when the latter first published his *Correspondence with Friends*. 'Preacher of the knout, apostle of ignorance, champion of obscurantism, panegyrist of Tartar morals, what are you doing? Look under your feet, you are standing over an abyss. I remembered again how you asserted in your book, as a great and indisputable truth, that literacy is not only useless to the ordinary man, but positively harmful. You do not, as far as I can see, properly understand the Russian public. Its character is determined by the state of Russian society, in which healthy forces

boil and burst forth, but, finding no outlet, produce only despondency, sadness, and apathy. Only in literature is there life and a forward movement. That is why the calling of a writer is so highly honoured in our country.'

Belinsky, who had expounded the excellencies of Pushkin, Lermontov, and Gogol to the whole reading public of Russia, was drawn most of all to Gogol, as the author who brought the neglected commoner into the creative field of literary ideas; this predilection partly accounts for his outraged disappointment when Gogol started to preach submission to authority as the first duty of every good Russian. It is characteristic of Belinsky that shortly before his death, when he was in the last stages of consumption, he dragged himself out to watch the building of the new railway station in St. Petersburg. To know that Russia was at last going to have at least one railway was, he said, a thought that gave him great consolation.

A far more original and versatile thinker was Alexander Herzen (1812-70), the natural son of a Russian nobleman and his German mistress. Already as a student at Moscow University he took an active interest in socialism, and he was twice exiled within Russia before leaving his country for ever in 1847. He played some part in the Paris revolution of 1848, and after its defeat he settled in London, where he became the principal voice of progressive Russia abroad. His free Russian newspaper *The Bell*¹ (*Kolokol*), though it was published in London and

¹ Edited by Herzen, with his friend and disciple, the poet N. P. Ogarev. The paper was started in 1857 and finally ceased publication in 1869.

afterwards on the Continent, penetrated all over Russia where, in spite of the vigilant security police, it was enthusiastically read and built up a tremendous influence for its editor's ideas and personality. Herzen's eclectic and empirical socialism did not prevent him from supporting the government of Alexander II during its period of reforms, but his eloquent plea for the Poles during the Polish rebellion of 1863 put an end to his favour with the moderate Russian liberals.

Herzen's solid claims to survival as a major literary figure rest not on his ephemeral journalism, which only shows him as a political and social agitator of great talent, nor on his didactic novel, *Whose Fault*, but on his exceptionally brilliant memoirs (*My Past and Recollections*), and on a number of miscellaneous essays of lasting interest, many of which were collected in his book, *From the Other Shore*. Herzen wrote his memoirs between 1850 and 1855. They form one of those essentially Russian autobiographies which read like history, philosophy, and fiction all rolled into one amazing narrative. His early days in Russia, his family, his university studies, his association with Belinsky and the rival intellectual groups in Moscow, are unfolded before us in a variety of masterly descriptions and portraits.

Even more valuable are the reflections inspired in Herzen's innermost self by the events of his strenuous and restless life. Written after the failure of the 1848 rebellions had finally broken his faith in European creative progress, these reflections are centred in an honest attempt to find a new meaning and purpose for his hitherto unsuccessful strivings. 'Disappointed, tired out—that is what the democratic

critics will say about my painful lines. Yes, I am disappointed, I am tired. Disappointment—that is a beaten, vulgar word, a mist under which is concealed laziness of heart, egoism, posing as love, and an empty parade of ambition, with pretensions for everything, but strength for none. . . . We are already sick to death of all these high unrecognized natures, in life and in novels, emaciated by envy and unhappy through pride. Can there be any genuine achievement, belonging to our times, at the bottom of these frightful mental struggles, distorted into comic parodies and vulgar masquerade?"

Herzen was not only disappointed in the failure of the big forward movements in politics; though remaining true to his own democratic convictions, he was piqued by the manners and methods of the new democratic Russians of the 'sixties, by their clumsy lack of discrimination, by their hasty intolerance and dogmatic conceit. Then the bitterness of exile and frustrated hopes—above all, the failure of his ideas to influence effective action—had left many unhealed wounds in his heart. 'The recognition of the impotence of ideas, the absence of any efficient force of truth acting on the real world, embitters us. We are afflicted and ill. This pain will pass with time, its tragic and passionate character will dissolve; it hardly exists in the new world—in the United States of America. Yet even *we* were of some use. Our historical role consists in securing through our affliction some humility and obedience to truth and in saving the next generation from these struggles. Human beings are growing more sober, we are their phase of intoxication, their birth-pangs. We know how nature makes use of individuals sooner or later,

sometimes without any victims at all, at other times wading through corpses—to nature, it is all the same, she goes her own way—Polyps die, not suspecting that they have served progress. We also served a purpose . . . *to be taken over by the future as an element does not mean that the future will fulfil our ideals.* Rome did not bring into realization the republic of Plato, nor did it realize the Greek ideals in general. The Middle Ages were not a development of Rome. Contemporary Western thought will enter into the body of history, will have its influence and place there, even as our body goes over into the composition of grass and other bodies. Such an immortality does not please us.'

Herzen's broad and far-sighted vision, his clarity and mental honesty, and his capacity for turning them inward to strike at any soothing complacency, immediately impress the student of his thought. His powerful mind was not cramped either by inherited traditions or current dogma, but it was weighed down by its own unrest, hunting far and wide in search of some positive support in the outside world, and not finding it. A fanatic in his enthusiasm, but a sceptic in his wide range of understanding, his lively temperament and mordant wit never left him in peace, driving him relentlessly from place to place and from one subject to another. His historical philosophy was accompanied by an avid curiosity about the application of science to life. Science (except its technical branches) and scientific method, Herzen advocated, must be rescued from their metaphysical fever and from the 'abysses of specialization', and made accessible to everyone. His democratic exposition of a scientific

general education for all, substituting clear, straightforward terms for obscurantism and pseudo-scientific jargon, helped to kindle Russian faith in the possibility of transforming social life through a wisely directed positive use of scientific knowledge. He was interested in the moral rather than the material advantages of science, regarding it as a means of breaking down superstition and slavery to habit more than as a panacea for removing poverty. 'We must wipe out in ourselves that shameful state of suffering and endurance—we endured, because we were young and immature, we endured because nothing was ready.'

The deliberate attempt to apply scientific methods to organizing social and political institutions was exactly what Herzen first admired in Western Europe; but throughout his long exile his heart was in Russia and he interpreted all his European experiences in terms of what his own people needed most at that time. As he often said, he only remained a wanderer abroad because individual free speech and action inside Russia were impossible, and because he was convinced he could serve his country better from outside than from within. If his first task was to keep progressive hopes alive in his own country, he considered it his second task to acquaint Europe with the best of Russia, with those healthier human qualities overshadowed by the grim political structure. 'Europe does not know us,' he wrote, 'she knows our government, our façade, and nothing more. . . .'

Herzen's own hatred of the cruel bureaucratic Empire was matched by an unshakable unreasoning faith in these more creative and enduring elements

in Russian national life, and his almost physical yearning for his own country bursts forth in some of the most poignant passages of his eloquent prose. 'In our poor northern undulating country there is a touching charm particularly close to my sympathy. Our rustic landscape views did not yield place in my memory either to the view of Sorrento, the Roman Campagna, the majestic Alps or the luxuriously laid-out farms of England. Our huge meadows covered with even green are soothingly beautiful; in our floating nature there is something peaceful, confiding, helpless, and intimately moving, a touch of what is sung in the Russian song and warmly responded to in the Russian heart.

'All the poetical elements brooding in the soul of the Russian people have emerged in the form of singularly melodious songs—the Slav peoples are singers *par excellence*. The Russian peasant found in his songs the only outlet for his sufferings. He sings constantly; whether he is working or leading his horse over the field, or resting in front of his hut; these songs can be distinguished from the songs of other Slav peoples, and even from those of the Ukrainians, by their deep sadness. Their words are an unadulterated plaint, losing themselves and their grief in the wide plains, gloomy pine forests, and boundless steppes, meeting no friendly echo. Their sadness does not express a striving for some romantic ideal, nor has it the sickly tone of monastic gloom peculiar to some German popular songs; it is rather the sadness of a personality chained down by a fate which it rebukes—a stifled desire unable to show itself in any other shape . . . a profound passionate and unhappy love, but genuinely attached to the

earth. In the middle of these melancholy songs, you suddenly hear the sounds of an orgy, of unrestrained revelry, wild cries, words devoid of sense, but which intoxicate and carry us away into a mad dance—very far from a decorously arranged dramatic dance-choir. . . . Then there is a whole class of Russian songs—like robbers' songs. These are no plaintive elegies, they are a bold shout, an overflowing of human gaiety, feeling itself free at last—a threatening, angry, and challenging cry.'

Herzen by upbringing belonged to the generation of the 'forties, with their ideal of enlightened and cultured personality, and he did not succeed in bridging the gulf between that generation in which gifted individuals worshipped art, philosophy, and religion, and the civic intelligentsia of the 'sixties, which confined itself to trying to introduce a better social environment for the masses just liberated from serfdom.¹ Plain hard work for a clear and limited programme of social service became the slogan of the 'sixties. While they found a place for an optimistic and practical *joie de vivre*, the new men felt some contempt, not unmixed with envy, for the more refined aesthetic ideals of the 'forties; and the 'raznochintsets' ('man of mixed ranks') was gradually taking the place of the nobleman in critical and philosophical literature, the tone of which changed correspondingly. The 'raznochintsets' was usually poor and hungry; the masses whose interests he advocated were poorer and hungrier still—and more

¹ The most interesting pre-revolutionary Russian *émigré* thinker after Herzen was Prince Peter Kropotkin (1842-1921), a leading theorist of anarchism, literary critic, and author of an excellent autobiography, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary* (1899), originally published in English.

ignorant; for them, obviously, bread and a minimum of education must come before beauty. Not having studied Europe at close quarters, as Herzen had,¹ these intellectuals still believed in scientific education as the ultimate panacea. They regarded literature as an important means of inspiring men to action, but this came to be judged more exclusively—as again after 1917—by a rigid measure of preconceived social utility; there even developed a dismal puritanical tendency to regard the cult of beauty and the pursuit of mass education as mutually exclusive activities at war with each other.

N. Chernyshevsky (1828-89), son of a Saratov priest, was the most representative and influential publicist of this period. Much of his work was journalism, and is almost unreadable to-day, though it was good journalism for its time and swayed a wide public through the columns of the radical periodical, *The Contemporary*. He fought tenaciously against the many survivals of the pre-reform age, and the popularity of his ideas became dangerous to the government. In 1862 he was arrested and lived for twenty years exiled in Siberia, whence he only returned in broken health in 1883. His literary work is remarkable for its calm reasonableness and for its generous assumption that most human beings were as sensible and kindly as himself. His novel *What To Do* preached faith in a happy future for

¹ Herzen's startling conclusion, that all European revolutionaries were fundamentally bourgeois in aspiration, had a damping effect on many Russians of that period, who looked chiefly to the West for a fresh example of social as well as technical progress; but this setback did not prevent the continued importation of revolutionary ideas, especially those of Karl Marx, from Europe to Russia. (cp. page 4.)

Russia. Though dry and didactic, it is still surprisingly readable. It stresses the need for stricter self-discipline and self-adaption in order to harness personal passions in the service of social work; to accomplish this process seemed much less difficult to the sanguine Chernyshevsky than it had to any previous Russian writer. The novel contains neither stormy nor tragic scenes, and the only extreme character is the ascetic Rachmetov, who slept on a plank covered with nails in order to test his endurance. This man, toughening his mind and body to become an iron-willed servant of duty to the community, is reminiscent of the self-mortifying kind of Christian and has certain traits of the future Bolshevik hero; he is aptly introduced as a fanatical contrast to the milder stimulus of ordinary enlightened self-interest and goodwill. These positive literary types were still, however, drab and colourless; they had arrived on the scene too recently to acquire any mellower tones of established culture, confined as they were to unimaginative studies of the new intellectual and social workers. The heroine of *What To Do* is principally occupied in the organization of a sewing-room on co-operative lines.

We should not forget that Chernyshevsky began his career as a literary critic and historian, and showed both learning and discrimination in this sphere. Reviewing L. Tolstoy's first published work, *Childhood and Adolescence*, he wrote: 'There are paintings which catch in their art the shimmering reflection of the moon on fast-moving waters, the quivering of light in shade on rustling leaves, and its transfusion into the changing shapes of cloud above. Critics say principally of such paintings that they

catch the life of nature; Tolstoy does something similar in rendering the mysterious movements of psychological life.' Chernyshevsky is mainly remembered now as a great publicist for the most advanced radicalism of his age—indeed, he has been claimed by some as a partial Marxist. As a Russian socialist he was wholly sincere, but his own apprehensions about the shape of the future were confided to his diary when he wrote of 'the unconquerable expectation of a coming revolution and thirst for it, although I know that for a long time no good will come out of it'. His political and economic articles hardly concern us in this context, and his most important single work directly affecting the development of Russian literature is probably his treatise, *The Aesthetic Relation of Art to Reality*. This work systematized the trend of the period towards denying art and literature any independent reality apart from their function as media for propagating concrete social ideals. Art seen in this light played a subordinate if essential part, illustrating like a map certain aspects of human psychology and philosophy.

N. A. Dobroliubov (1836–61), like Chernyshevsky, the son of a poor village priest, was his close friend, disciple, and collaborator on *The Contemporary*. Had he not died so young he might have developed into another influential critic. He created a sensation in literary circles by his clever essay on 'What is Oblomovism', in which he placed Pushkin's, Lermontov's, and Turgenev's heroes in the same category as Goncharov's.

D. I. Pisarev (1841–68), who sprang from an impoverished family of provincial nobility, was a brilliant essayist who sought to popularize scientific

knowledge and to work out a feasible morality for the emancipated Russian. He described the structure of Russian society as one in which the forms had petrified and stood like sphinxes, motionless and unchangeable. He pointed out that serfdom, although legally abolished, still existed in its essence so long as the crass ignorance, barbarism, and mental timidity, so long associated with it, were not overcome. Institutional reforms alone were hopelessly inadequate. 'Can any benefit,' he wrote, 'emerge from all these reforms and good beginnings, if the individuals themselves remain insignificant?' If life does not provide lively enjoyment and absorbing work, what is the good of living? And before any such possibility could start to be realized in Russia, Pisarev urged that the fundamentally undisciplined Russian must learn to economize his scattered energy and to show greater respect for individual personality.

Pisarev has often been described as sharing the anti-aesthetic views prevalent among the intellectuals of the 'sixties, but this is only partly true. He certainly remarked as a fact that belles-lettres and art had been relegated to the background and that the works of fiction which then attracted most public attention were those which touched most nearly on some topical question of actual life. But he protested against being carried away by a pedantic adherence to dogma. 'If Nekrasov', he wrote, 'can only express himself in verses, let him write verse; if Turgenev can only imagine Bazarov and not explain him, then let him imagine him. . . . Because consistent realism despises whatever is not useful, that does not mean we must tell the poet to go and mend shoes. Shakespeare, Goethe, and Heine were useful poets just

because they were rich in ideas.' Pisarev said that the most responsible task which lay before Russia was to educate the peasant masses, who were still passive and almost shapeless material in the hands of their rulers. In this sense he also appealed to the enlightened self-interest of the rising capitalists and factory owners; if they 'learn to think, then they will learn to identify their own interests with the needs of the world which surrounds them. They will see that it is more profitable and pleasant to increase the general wealth than to extract the last penny from their employees.' Pisarev's exhortations were never without a practical and topical bearing; he repeatedly illustrated how soaring reflections and endless abstract argument which the cult of German philosophy had made so fashionable, were a useless luxury for a society in which the most elementary knowledge was lacking. Since first things must come first, then bread, boots, and literacy must precede poetry, even if poetry was also useful.

Among the early critics and thinkers opposed to the rationalizing trend of this period the most influential were A. S. Khomyakov, theologian and patriotic poet, and I. Aksakov, political journalist, both of whom have been mentioned in the wider setting of chapter I. In the 'seventies the emphasis of the rationalizing intellectuals shifted and found in the populist movement (agrarian socialism) more points of contact with the religious group. The philanthropic initiative of the 'penitent nobles' which had assisted the emancipation of the serfs, the foundation of village schools, and the establishment of *Zemstvos*,¹ had been followed by Pisarev's pre-

¹ Organs of local self-government instituted in 1864

occupation with educating the masses as individual rational beings. This was conceived as the main new duty of the intellectual towards the people. But here some confusion arose between the development of Pisarev's 'critically minded individual' and his obligation to serve the needs of the peasants. If this service was to avoid turning into merely theoretical or even hypocritical philanthropy, the intellectual could only ascertain the true needs of the peasants by mixing with them and living as they did. N. Mikhailovsky (1842-1904) became an esteemed intellectual leader of this movement by demonstrating that there was no logical contradiction between the ideals of developing the personality and serving the primitive peasants. There were elements in Russian village life which particularly favoured a healthy and variegated individual development. Mikhailovsky's conclusion—which gave little save a slender logical satisfaction—was that sound social theory does not demand that the social element should swamp the individual nor that the individual self-interest should prevail over social needs, but that social and personal interests must be merged, since no social objectives could be reached except through the action of individuals.

The emotional roots of the populist movement of the 'seventies were in the uneasy conscience of the self-owner, in his desire for justice and for making amends; but that movement ignored the spread of industry and urban influences in Russia, the prevailing careerism and thirst for profits, which had penetrated even to the peasantry. Turgenev wrote in a letter to Herzen: 'The peasants before whom you bow down are conservative to the highest

degree, and even bear in themselves the embryo of bourgeoisie in their tanned sheepskins and warm dirty huts, with their revulsion from any civic responsibility.' The intelligentsia of the 'seventies either overlooked or fought against the accomplished fact that the educated peasant was developing in the direction of the middle class in a country where industry and to some extent agriculture were already being dealt with through large-scale organizations on profit-making lines. And populism, motivated by impulsive mystic qualities quite alien to doctrinaire socialism, ran counter to the overriding calculation and greed of its opponents.

M. E. Saltykov-Shchedrin (1826-89) occupied an ambiguous position in the intellectual and literary movement of the 'seventies and 'eighties. The conscious preoccupation of imaginative literature with topical social problems tended to push fiction closer to journalism, and farther away from art. Shchedrin was a lively and mordant publicist—he has been called a Russian Swift—who used fictional forms to drive his morals home more vividly. He satirized the Russian bureaucracy, the new careerists and parvenus, and drew particular attention to the tremendous efforts still needed to overcome the spiritual heritage of serfdom, unenterprising cowardice and the servile state of mind. Saltykov (who took the pseudonym of Shchedrin as a nom-de-plume) was a member of the provincial nobility, and for many years a provincial government official. In 1868 he became one of the editors of *The Fatherland Annals*, having been previously associated with *The Contemporary*. His 'Provincial Sketches' are read for their comic but grim irony. Though

he hated governmental official Russia, Shchedrin was too sceptical a man of the world to humble himself before the peasants or wax romantic about them, nor was he servile to the state. In his subtle *Fables*, full of humorous wisdom, he symbolized the baseness, cowardice, and self-deception which he saw around him, and hinted at the essence of the tyranny which exploited them. Such fables as 'The Wise Gudgeon', 'The Eagle as Mecaenas', 'The Self-Sacrificing Hare', and 'The Idealistic Carp', are as good in their way as the best of Krylov or La Fontaine.

Shehedrin's sharp eye saw in Russia many different kinds and degrees of surviving slavery; the juridical state of slavery—abolished in 1861—was as distinct from ingrained spiritual slavery, as the latter was from the slavery of economic dependence, or from that of subordinates, servile to their superior officers. The wisdom of 'The Wise Gudgeon' was simplicity itself, since it consisted solely in hiding himself permanently in a hole to make sure he would not run the risk of being eaten by any larger or fiercer fish, as he might have done if he had swum about in the water. 'He lived and trembled—that was all.' 'The Idealistic Carp' believed that fighting and eating each other is not the normal law of life, and that new discoveries would enable all fish to live together in harmony. A friend tells him about the pike, of whose existence the naïve carp has never heard. He refuses to believe in the pike's inexorable partiality for carp as his natural food, and since he enjoys nothing more than conducting arguments about his high ideals, he one day starts a discourse with the pike, whom he treats as a potential convert. But

the pike, bored stiff by the carp's uplifting speeches, after listening for a while yawns widely, and then snaps him up and swallows him. The perch, who saw this end, exclaimed, 'So there they go our disputes!'

'The Eagle as Maecenas' is the nearest that censorship could allow to a veiled satire on the Tsar and his bureaucracy. 'Eagles are robbers and flesh-eaters, but have this justification, that nature made them complete anti-vegetarians. And as they are at the same time strong, far-sighted, quick, and merciless, it is quite understandable that when they appear, the whole feathered Empire hurries into hiding. But this is the result of fear—and not of admiration—as some poets have affirmed.' The imperial bird gets tired of living in splendid isolation and orders arrangements to be made for him to live in the style of a great landowner. All this is done and, among other things, the eagle becomes a patron of education and the arts. 'The troubles began with a grave mistake on the part of the owl and the falcon who had accepted the management of the work of education. They took it into their heads to teach the eagle himself to read and write—without conspicuous success. . . . 'Suppose you have stolen ten geese, of which you have given two to the police-inspector's clerk and eaten one yourself, how many have you left?' asked the falcon reproachfully. The eagle was unable to work out the problem, so he remained silent, but anger against the falcon burned in his heart more and more fiercely every day.' After that affairs go from bad to worse, the educational establishments have to be shut, and the closing *y* is whether eagles are inevitably spoiled by

education or are bound by nature to exert a blighting influence on it.

The majority of intellectually active Russians at this time were radicals and agnostics, but the more religious-minded ones were attracted by the mystic and absolute elements in agrarian socialism and in Tolstoy's personal version of it. Only a small minority adopted a sincere and constructive attitude of criticism towards all forms of socialist thought, and this minority—with the exception of Dostoevsky—found little favour with the Russian reading public. On the other hand, some of the more nationalistic Slavophils won the support of the government, and they exerted a wider influence after the assassination of Alexander II in 1881 had abruptly deflected many theoretical radicals from the extremer consequences of radicalism in practical politics.

The boldest and most original of the conservative thinkers was Constantine Leontiev (1831-91). He was a provincial nobleman who studied medicine at Moscow University and volunteered for the Crimean War as a military surgeon while he was still a student. He started with the more fashionable contemporary outlook, vaguely humanitarian and agnostic, but later became a convert to Byzantine orthodoxy. He led a full, varied, and romantically adventurous life, running through the professions of surgeon, consul, editor, novelist, and philosopher, and ending his days as a monk of the orthodox Optina Monastery. He believed that concrete visible beauty was the ultimate value by which every civilization should be judged, and to which all other values must be subordinated, his fervent cult of personal loyalty, strength, and inequality has caused

him to be compared with Nietzsche, whom he resembled superficially.¹ In an article which he wrote on Dostoevsky's Pushkin memorial speech he criticized the whole populist trend. 'In those words—humble yourself in front of the people —(especially in front of the peasant) there is confusion and partial falsehood. Why should we humble ourselves before the common people? Out of respect for their physical labour? Everyone knows that goes without saying, and many of our serf-owners understood it long ago. To imitate their moral qualities? They have, of course, very good ones. But I do not think that the family, social, and personal qualities of our common people are altogether so worthy of imitation. It is hardly necessary to imitate their harsh treatment of the sick and feeble, their ruthless cruelty when they are angry, their drunkenness, their disposition to trickery and even to fraud.' In his brilliant critical study of Tolstoy, Leontiev starts by comparing the relative value of Tolstoy the author with one of his own creations, Count Vronsky, 'the energetic cultured and firm soldier', in *Anna Karenina*, and observes: 'In our troubled, irritable, and mean-spirited time, Vronsky is such more useful to me than the great novelists and certainly more useful than those eternal "seekers", like Levin, who never find anything definite or firm.' Leontiev, like Tolstoy, had been through the Crimean War, but had drawn his own conclusions from it. 'I am sure that Count Tolstoy will remember what an immeasurable

¹Leontiev's remarkable essay, 'The Average European as the ideal and instrument of universal destruction', shows *inter alia* how far his basic outlook differed from Nietzsche's.

distance there was between the self-loving Hamlet-like refinement and unsteadiness of some and the simple firm straightforwardness of others—whether *higher* or *lower* than the former in social standing . . . some members of the nobility at that time certainly learned to bow down to the "Karataevs", but not the Nicolas Rostovs or Vronskys of the 'fifties, who, while loving the Karataevs, were ready to give them a beating on necessary occasions.' In his essay on 'Byzantinism and Slavdom', Leontiev developed his idea of Byzantine Christianity, firm preservation of national tradition, and stable monarchical government. He believed that nineteenth-century Europe had reached the stage of dissolution, and he wanted to seal off Russia from the infection of Europe's atheistic and levelling-down tendencies, to fight, if possible, the ruinous equalizing decay of illusory 'progress' which was already spreading from Europe to Russia.

A more systematic revival of religious idealism came from the poet and philosopher, V. Soloviev (1853–1900). In his *Crisis of Western Philosophy* he demonstrated the sterility of positivism, and in his subsequent works he elaborated the theme of union between the Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant churches. His evolutionary and liberal outlook was applied to a definite goal, the Kingdom of God on earth, the fulfilment of which he saw in the future fusion of Church and State. He shared the Slavophil belief that Russians still preserved the simplicity, piety, and integrity necessary for a creative national life, whereas in western Europe rationalism, violence, and fraud were undermining the foundations of any spiritually healthy society. His *War, Progress and*

the End of Human History sets out forcefully and with a wealth of imagery a number of his matured philosophical views towards the end of his life. Soloviev firmly opposed Tolstoy's doctrine of categorical pacifism and non-resistance to violence; he thought it was possible both to wage a righteous war and to cling to a dishonourable and evil peace. In the course of this dialogue a general says: 'I am a man who is morally of the average type.' He then describes how his most complete moral satisfaction was the slaughter of 3,000 Turks who had just annihilated an Armenian village after committing vile atrocities on the inhabitants. 'In the depths of my soul I felt utter and complete confidence. My heart was light. I trod on air.' But war loses its *raison d'être* when it is no longer necessary as a means of defending the nation. Soloviev imagined that the time must come for the peaceful expansion of European culture all over the world, but he doubted whether this could be achieved without being preceded by terrific convulsions. He had visions of the complete destruction of Western civilization by Asiatics, so that the first United State of Europe was long delayed and only came to be founded by an underground society built up under dire stress to free Europe from Asiatic rule.

A less solid but remarkably independent writer was V. Rozanov (1856–1919). He resembled Soloviev in his religious anti-rationalistic outlook, but he carried naked personal intuition to bewildering extremes. He felt an acute sympathy for Dostoevsky as a psychologist (finding in him a vindication of his own longing for opposite things at the same time) and his commentary *The Legend of the Gran-*

Inquisitor, based on an interpretation of *The Brothers Karamazov*, started off that series of penetrating critiques of Dostoevsky's ideas, which played some part in the later development both of Russian and western European literature. Despising formal order, discipline, and convention of every kind, his own writing sought to avoid the use of logical structure and sequence, and to convey its fluid sense, without strain, through an intricate network of emotional associations. The erotic mysticism, towards which he was drawn, is expounded in a number of discursive books which he wrote about Christianity, criticizing particularly its detrimental 'unnatural' bearing on Russian family life. His most characteristic work, however, is in the strange fragmentary utterances published under the titles *Solitary Thoughts* and *Fallen Leaves*. Having spent many years as an unsuccessful secondary schoolmaster, Rozanov had grown to hate the institutional type of education. 'It is not the universities that have brought up the genuine Russians,' he proclaimed, 'but the good old illiterate nurses.' He considered universities as a kind of factory for manufacturing diplomas and patent mediocrities for routine state service, and urged that careful reading and reflection on every page of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky would do much more for genuine education than any amount of school instruction. He summed up his defence of personality against bondage to systems when he wrote: 'Technique applied to the soul gave it omnipotence. But it also crushed the soul. There appeared a technical soul and inspiration died.'

The individualistic philosophical mysticism of L. Shestov (b. 1866) is akin to the central ideas of

Rozanov, but Shestov's destructive exposition of the fallacies both of conventional rationalism and idealism ('The world has long been weary of universal truths,' he said) is written in a compact, lively but logical style, quite unlike the obscure intuitive flashes of Rozanov and nearer to the lucid polemical prose of Tolstoy. He compared and extolled the religious experience of individual mystics, ranging from Dostoevsky and Nietzsche back to St. Augustine and Plotinus, believing he had found in them a deep identity of conviction capable of demolishing all those more intelligible and historical systematizations of metaphysical and moral thought, which identified the goal of life with goodness or rationality. He was in many ways, though far from exclusively, a disciple of Nietzsche. 'Nietzsche has shown us the way—we must seek for that which is *above* pity, *above* good.' Two of his most substantial books, *The Good in the Teaching of Tolstoy and Nietzsche* and *Dostoevsky and Nietzsche, the Philosophy of Tragedy*, have Nietzsche's ideas as their focal point.

Both Shestov and Rozanov led to a logical stalemate, and their thought had so little bearing on the urgent practical issues of the time that its influence hardly extended beyond a small intellectual circle to whom it provided emotional stimulus and a measure of consolation rather than guidance for a solution of any problems. But Shestov's thought accomplished a positive task by brushing aside a lot of metaphysical cobwebs, and in his exaggerated stress on historical relativity he paradoxically prepared the ground for the intellectual acceptance of materialism. 'Then at last you will be convinced

that truth does not depend on logic, that there are no logical truths at all, and that you therefore have the right to search for what you like, how you like, without argument. While the object of search is "truth", as it is understood nowadays, one must be prepared for anything. For instance, the materialists will be right, and matter and energy are the basis of the world. It does not matter that we can immediately confound the materialists with their own conclusions. Yesterday's error may be to-morrow's truth, even a self-evident truth. I have already pointed out that the materialistic conception of the world is just as capable of enchanting men as any other, pantheistic or idealistic.' Shestov not only foresaw the sweeping advent of materialism, if enough people really wanted it or worked for it: he also welcomed the 'barbarism' of certain impending destructive forces. This is evident in his remarks about human sacrifices. 'In them Spencer sees a barbarity, as an educated European should. I also see in them barbarity, because I also am a European and have a scientific education. But I deeply envy their barbarity, and I curse the cultivation which has herded me together with believing missionaries, idealist, materialist, and positivist philosophers into the narrow fold of the sultry and disgusting apprehensible world . . . we are guessing at the best, we are sicklied with dreams, but our life passes outside our guesses and our dreams.'

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that truth does not depend on logic, that there are no logical truths at all, and that you therefore have the right to search for what you like, how you like, without argument. While the object of search is "truth", as it is understood nowadays, one must be prepared for anything. For instance, the materialists will be right, and matter and energy are the basis of the world. It does not matter that we can immediately confound the materialists with their own conclusions. Yesterday's error may be to-morrow's truth, even a self-evident truth. I have already pointed out that the materialistic conception of the world is just as capable of enchanting men as any other, pantheistic or idealistic.' Shestov not only foresaw the sweeping advent of materialism, if enough people really wanted it or worked for it: he also welcomed the 'barbarism' of certain impending destructive forces. This is evident in his remarks about human sacrifices. 'In them Spencer sees a barbarity, as an educated European should. I also see in them barbarity, because I also am a European and have a scientific education. But I deeply envy their barbarity, and I curse the cultivation which has herded me together with believing missionaries, idealist, materialist, and positivist philosophers into the narrow fold of the sultry and disgusting apprehensible world . . . we are guessing at the best, we are sicklied with dreams, but our life passes outside our guesses and our dreams.'

TOLSTOY AND DOSTOEVSKY

THE literary historian Prince Mirsky summed up the customary comparison of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky when he wrote about what they had in common: 'The two are comparable not only in size (they were head and shoulders above the rest of their contemporaries), but also in kind. They were both masters of the psychological novel. They were both passionately interested in the essential problems of life, death, and God, and both endeavoured to create a system of moral and social philosophy on a religious foundation . . . even apart from their imaginative work they were both (though in an unequal degree) great writers, and Tolstoy the greatest master of non-narrative Russian prose.'

But their personalities were radically different, and even where they dealt with the same subjects they approached them from opposite angles. Dostoevsky found his raw material chiefly among the merchants, intellectuals, and social outcasts of the Russian towns; Tolstoy among the nobility, officials, and peasants centred in the country. A healthy, prosperous country gentleman, by all worldly standards highly successful, a famous and revered international figure during his own lifetime, Tolstoy appeared to enjoy every outward blessing which the poor, sick, and perpetually struggling Dostoevsky lacked. Yet those very objectives which Tolstoy pursued so ardently in his later years, but which somehow eluded his grasp, the renunciation of conventional

civilization, the moral satisfaction of ordinary physical work, the opportunity for spiritual unification with the simple, common people, all these fell to Dostoevsky's lot unsolicited, in full measure, and through the grimdest experiences of penal servitude.

Tolstoy and Dostoevsky never met, and though they expressed plenty of mutual admiration, their attitude to each other was uneasy. Dostoevsky referred to himself as 'a realist in the highest sense' because he depicted 'the depths of the human soul', but his greatest characters, though real enough in the power of their conception, seem fantastic disembodied vehicles of abstract ideas and passions when compared with the thoroughly human, earthly and more balanced people inhabiting the world of Tolstoy. Indeed, Dostoevsky was primarily a dramatic writer—often melodramatic—who relied on abnormal extreme characters, and on sensational situations, projected through a torrent of impassioned dialogue. Tolstoy's psychological range was at least as wide as Dostoevsky's; his penetration into the motives of his characters equally profound, and his literary art, which used description and analysis with as perfect a mastery as dialogue, was greatly superior to that of Dostoevsky, who overloaded his style and never managed to eliminate the superfluous.

The just admiration for Dostoevsky's personal courage, and for the startling novelty and thoroughness of his psychological method in fiction, has often been carried beyond its proper sphere and distorted into exaggerated claims about his unique supremacy both as an artist and a philosopher. Seen in to-day's

perspective, the artistic qualities of his novels and their intellectual analysis, though rising to genius in places, fall short of Tolstoy's Olympian grandeur. Pages of superb dialogue are followed by crude incidents, worthy of a cheap detective story, or are suddenly spoiled by a clumsy sequence of dreary theoretical discussion quite inappropriate and irrelevant to the construction of the novel. Admittedly, he wrote in feverish haste and for the money to live, fighting with editors and publishers over advances and terms, and he envied Tolstoy and Turgenev the polished clarity of their style, which he attributed to the fact that they could write in their own time and at their ease. Yet even *The Brothers Karamazov*, the only one of his great novels written over a long period in freedom from financial stress, abounds in Dostoevsky's characteristic unevenness, whereas in Tolstoy's best prose, as in Turgenev's, every phrase is chiselled and rounded off to the point where not a single word could be removed or added without upsetting the perfectly adjusted rhythm and sense of proportion. Dostoevsky has been set up by certain European circles, quite erroneously, as the most typical Russian writer, perhaps because he assimilated far less European culture than Tolstoy, or because there are even fewer Western writers than other Russian writers who genuinely resemble him. In fact it is misleading to regard Dostoevsky as more typical than exceptional even as it would be absurd to treat the characters which he invented in fiction as pictures of typical Russians in everyday life.

•Count Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910) was descended on both sides from noble families who had made some

worthy contribution to Russian history. He received the usual aristocratic education of his day, and after leaving Kazan University without taking his degree (because he had come to the conclusion that he could learn nothing more there) he entered the army and fought in the Crimean War. Then after a few winters spent in St. Petersburg and Moscow and a journey to Europe, he married (1861), and spent the rest of his life almost uninterruptedly as a patriarchal country gentleman on his estate at Yasnaya Polyana in the Tula province. He hardly ever mixed with intellectuals or professional people—he hated and sedulously avoided literary or intellectual cliques—so it is not surprising that his work concentrates on the personal and family problems of landowner and peasants, almost excluding other classes and interests which had grown up in the partially industrialized Russia of the later nineteenth century; but of course he knew quite enough about town life (he regularly visited Moscow) to describe it magnificently, and constantly to condemn its emptiness and corruption, compared with the simple integrity of rural existence.

In his first published work, *Childhood* (1852), and in its sequels, *Boyhood* and *Youth*, Tolstoy already proved himself a mature artist, a master of vigorous and limpid prose with a genius for revealing the inner lives of his characters through a picture of their actions and physical mannerisms. At the same time there were abundant signs of that spiritual disharmony between the joyful Epicurean and the self-denying Puritan, betraying the clash of ideals and forms of love inherent in Tolstoy's passionate and many-sided personality. Symbolic of this

inward conflict is the account of the young Irtenev, retiring to the attic to lash his bare back with a rope in order to harden himself to endure physical pain, and then—suddenly remembering that death may come at any moment—he neglects his lessons for three days on end and just lies on his bed enjoying some novel and eating honey cakes which he had bought with his last remaining coins. A prematurely experienced and introspective boy, Tolstoy thought he had faded before he had flowered. 'All this moral labour brought me nothing except a shiftiness of mind, a weakening of will-power and a habit of constant self-analysis, destroying freshness of feeling and clarity of judgment.' No great writer has ever told us more about himself than Tolstoy, and his novels as well as his own intimate confessions are parts of one vast teeming autobiography. Prince Neklyudov in *The Morning of a Landowner* (1852) is obviously an adult continuation of Irtenev. His attempts to confer benefits on his peasants end in failure, and instead of being rewarded by some gratitude or sign of improvement, he finds in them only continued vice, distrust, and helplessness. To escape from all this disappointment Olenin in *The Cossacks* (1853) goes with the army to the Caucasus, which is exactly what Tolstoy himself did in 1851. Olenin learns there from the pagan old Cossack Eroshka that he must follow up his attempts to simplify his habits and desires by a further effort to forget himself and live for other people; otherwise his contentment cannot last. In *Sevastopol* (1856) Tolstoy incorporated his own experiences of the famous siege, where he fought throughout the defence. These strong, brilliant war scenes were a forecast of the grander,

mellower, and more completely integrated descriptions of the great battles in *War and Peace*.

Albert (1857), one of Tolstoy's finest descriptive short stories, was written towards the close of this turbulent period before his marriage. It is outstanding both for the sustained imaginative power of its language, for the light which it throws on his state of mind at this time, and for its early evidence of his virtually religious veneration of art—so many years before his conversion. The scene takes place in that luxurious setting, which Tolstoy always conjured up so truthfully, at one of those St. Petersburg balls, where gay young officers enjoy themselves and champagne flows copiously. Among them is Delesov, a worldly middle-aged bachelor. At a moment when the guests are jaded and start to feel that their gaiety is painfully artificial, a strange figure enters the handsome classical ballroom. 'He was a man of medium height with a thin bent back and long dishevelled hair. He wore a short coat and narrow torn trousers over his rough and uncleaned boots. A twisted tie was fastened round his lean white neck. His thin wrists stuck out from under the sleeves of a dirty shirt. But in spite of the extraordinary emaciation of his body, his face was delicately formed and fresh colour glowed in his cheeks under the white skin. His tired dark eyes looked straight before him, softly questioning and grave.' This queer intruder joined in the dancing, but in the middle of a quadrille an officer accidentally bumped into him, his weak legs gave way, and he fell flat on his face. 'Who is he?' they asked the hostess. 'A poor man, a musician; a good fellow, but pathetic, as you see.' She said this without being embarrassed by Albert's presence.

He recovered himself and shrank away from the people who were surrounding him. 'It's nothing at all,' he said suddenly, rising from his chair with visible effort. And to show that he was quite unhurt he walked into the middle of the room and started to jump about, but stumbled and would have fallen again, if he had not been supported by helping hands.

Suddenly he raised his head, smoothed back his hair with the same rather vulgar gesture, and going up to the violinist took the violin from his hands. Without paying any more attention to anyone Albert pressed the violin to his shoulder and walked slowly alongside the piano, tuning his instrument. Then he put it in position, briskly struck a chord and, throwing back his head, turned to the pianist who was getting ready to accompany him. 'Mélancolie G-dur', he called to the pianist, with a gesture of command. Then immediately, as if asking forgiveness for that imperative gesture, he smiled meekly and looked round at the audience. Thrusting back his hair with the hand that held the bow, Albert stopped at the corner of the piano, and with a smooth flowing movement passed his bow across the strings. A pure firm note rang out in the room and complete silence fell. The notes of the theme poured forth straight after the first one, freely and gracefully, suddenly illuminating the inner world of each listener with an unexpected clear and reassuring light. Not a single false or exaggerated sound disturbed the harmonious absorption of the audience; every note was clear-cut, graceful, and significant. The whole audience followed the music in motionless silence, stirred by a new expectation and hope.

Awoken suddenly from the state of boredom, noisy distraction, and spiritual torpor in which they had just been bound, they were carried away imperceptibly into an entirely different world, whose existence they had forgotten. Various feelings one after another rose up in their souls; now a serene contemplation of the past, now a passionate memory of some happy moment, now an insatiable craving for power and splendour, now a sense of dumb resignation, of sadness and unrequited love. The sounds, turn by turn, melancholy and tender, then defiantly or desperately strong, mingled freely together and poured out so abundantly in one melody after another, so spontaneously and with such an absolute grace and power, that the notes themselves existed no longer, but instead there flowed into the soul a beautiful torrent of poetry, long familiar but only now revealed. Albert seemed to grow taller and taller with every phrase. No one could now call him ugly or queer-looking. Pressing the violin to his chin and listening to his music, with an expression of rapt attention, he moved his feet convulsively from time to time, now straightening himself to his full height, now strenuously bending his back. His face shone with an uninterrupted ecstatic joy; his eyes burned with a brilliant dry glitter, his nostrils were distended and his red lips opened with delight. Occasionally his head leaned closer to the violin, his eyes closed and his face, half-covered by his hair, lit up with a smile of serene happiness. Occasionally he drew himself up and cast a glance round the room, and his clear forehead and beaming face glowed with pride, dignity, and consciousness of power. Once the pianist blundered and struck a wrong chord. Then

a spasm of physical pain ran through the whole body and face of the musician. He stopped playing for a second, and stamping his foot with an expression of childish rage, called out 'Moll Ce Moll'. The pianist corrected himself. Albert closed his eyes, smiled, and again forgetting himself, the others and the whole world, blissfully abandoned himself to his music.

Delesov experienced an extraordinary sensation. A kind of cold circle, shrinking and expanding in turns, seemed to grip his head. The roots of his hair became sensitive, a cold shiver ran up his spine, something rose higher and higher in his throat, and tears involuntarily ran down his cheeks. He shook himself, tried to hold them back and wipe them away unobserved, but fresh ones rose in their place. By some strange linking of associations, the first notes of Albert's violin carried Delesov right back to his early youth. All the unappreciated lost minutes of that time took shape before him one by one, not as insignificant moments of a fleeting present, but like permanent growing reproachful images of the past.

Something strange had happened to everyone present, and there was a strange tension in the air during the dead silence which followed Albert's performance. It was as if each person wanted to speak out, but could not, and to say what all this signified. What did it mean? The brilliantly lit warm room, the lovely women, the grey light of dawn visible through the windows, the excitement tingling in the blood and the pure impression of the fleeting music? But no one even tried to explain what it all meant; on the contrary, almost all of

them, feeling it was beyond their power to go over completely to what this new impression had opened out to them, inwardly rebelled against it.

Family Happiness (1859), a novel written shortly before Tolstoy's marriage, treats exclusively and very sensitively the new theme of family life, which now came to the forefront of his attention. Tolstoy was thirty-four when he married, and his wife only eighteen. *Family Happiness* is the story of a young girl who marries the guardian whom she had formerly looked on as a father. The changing phases of their personal relations are analysed with a deep and acute understanding. The rift between them starts when the husband yields to his young wife's vague longing for the social distractions of St. Petersburg, and she is naïve enough to enjoy the flattery of her worldly admirers and imagine it to be sincere. Her husband lets her bask in these deceptions, understanding that they have a novel charm for her, however stale they are to him, and hopefully anticipates that she will soon tire of them, as he had done, and return of her own accord to the more enduring ties of a quiet family life. But one frivolous action of hers shocks him into a sharp reproach, which in its turn suddenly arouses her obstinacy. So the rift widens; his own feeling for her grows colder, and though a child is born, it does not reunite them. The wife feels remorse, pain, and bewilderment, for she does not know whom to blame or how to recover her lost happiness; only gradually the misunderstandings are dispelled and a return to happiness, but on a different foundation, begins for them both.

'No,' he said, 'I did not speak the truth in saying

that I do not regret the past; a place for love has remained, but it has become a painful one, there is no more strength and sap in it, only memory and thankfulness have survived . . .’ She interrupts him. ‘“Do not speak like that, let everything be as it was before. Cannot that be?” I asked, looking into his eyes. But his eyes were clear and quiet, and did not answer my searching question. At the same time as I spoke, I already felt that what I wanted and asked him for was impossible. He smiled tenderly, calmly —an elderly smile it seemed to me. “How young you are, and I am so old,” he said. “I no longer have in me what you are looking for; why deceive oneself?” he added, continuing to smile. I stood silently beside him and my heart became quieter. “We won’t try to repeat life,” he continued, “we won’t lie to ourselves. Why should we go on searching and be agitated. We have already found ourselves, and we have had our share of happiness. It is time for us to withdraw and make place for him,” he said, pointing to the nurse who had just entered the door of the terrace with Vanya. “So it is, my dear friend,” he concluded, bending my head towards him and kissing it. It was not a lover but an old friend who kissed me. From the garden the fragrant freshness of the night rose stronger and sweeter, and in the sky more stars lit up. I looked at him and my heart was calmed; the painful, suppressed irritation which had made me suffer for so long had been removed. I suddenly understood clearly that the feelings of that time were past beyond recall, like the time itself, and that to revive it now was not only impossible, but would have been painful and embarrassing.’

After his marriage Tolstoy settled down to the energetic life of an enterprising landowner, occupied with agriculture, horse- and pig-breeding—and, of course, with writing books. This period, which lasted twenty years, till his so-called conversion, saw the creation of his two great epics, *War and Peace* (1862-9) and *Anna Karenina* (1875-7). These are probably the only two Russian novels which are as widely known abroad as in the country of their origin, and consequently no special summary or account of them is needed here. It is interesting to recall that Tolstoy originally wanted to write a novel about the Decembrists (which he began), but the pursuit of this idea to its source led him back to Russia in the Napoleonic wars, and thus *War and Peace* was conceived. It is not, except in name, a historical novel, for it is beyond history and can well afford to pay no marked attention to historical accuracy; though it is based on a family chronicle of Tolstoy's parents and grandparents, it is freely transposed into the idiom and mental atmosphere of the second half of the nineteenth century. The novel is loosely constructed round the relations of two families, the Rostovs and Bolkonskys, the members of which are in touch with all the stirring events of their time, and thus become focal points in a huge panorama of the whole Russian nation. Here history, imaginary scenes and philosophic reflections are thrown together with tremendous creative zest. Many have said that the most striking thing about the characters in *War and Peace* is that they seem to be much more intensely alive and convincing than real people. The roundness and fullness of these characters is enhanced by Tolstoy's genius for

representing their idea concretely as motives for specific actions, and for observing the essence of their personality through the medium of physical traits and mannerisms. The short upper lip and chirping voice of Prince André's frivolous wife, the heavy steps and the large luminous eyes of Princess Mary, the slow steady movements of Kutuzov, the white plumpness of Napoleon, are all dominating physical factors without which these personalities would be quite inconceivable; interwoven in different contexts throughout the story like the leitmotivs in a Wagner opera, they create an almost overpowering effect of solid physical presence.

The immense individual variety of the characters is no less amazing than their breathing lifelike quality—the sceptical cosmopolitan Prince André Bolkonsky, superficially like a refined French aristocrat, but underneath a genuine Russian with a temperament running to extremes, the fearless and reckless Dolokhov, who for a bet drank a bottle of wine in one draught balanced outside a high window ledge, the correct calculating careerist Boris Dubretskoy and his cunning but pathetic old mother, the enchanting, warmly spontaneous, wholly feminine Natasha Rostova—and the icily cold *terre-à-terre* courtesan Hélène Kouragina—to name only a few contrasts out of the multitude. The character who voices most of Tolstoy's own strivings is Pierre Bezukhov. He absorbs impressions like a sponge, and passes through all the mental phases—from libertinism to freemasonry—which prevailed in Russia during the reign of Alexander I. He is roused to a spiritual crisis by the splendour of the action reflected in the huge fire which destroyed Moscow to

prevent it from falling into the hands of Napoleon's victorious army, and in his humble admiration of the peasant Karataev we see the later Tolstoy in embryo. Finally, after his marriage to Natasha, we are left to assume that Pierre has found a new balance and satisfaction in family life, even as the formerly volatile Natasha felt herself wholly bound to her husband as a wife and mother, not by those poetical feelings which originally drew her to him, but by some other indefinite but strong tie—like that of her own soul with her body. The last phase of Pierre in *War and Peace* is, as it were, reincarnated and carried a stage further in the Levin of *Anna Karenina*, who finds his peaceful, industrious country life inadequate, and is beset by a new crisis of torturing doubt which is only ended by the enlightenment achieved through understanding the unconscious wisdom of some peasants.

War and Peace only hints at this later mode of deliberate self-perfection, for in the main it sees individuals acting as the unconscious instruments of movements and forces beyond their control. Not Kutuzov, nor Alexander I, least of all Napoleon, is responsible for the stirring events which changed the face of Europe in 1812. If there are real heroes in the war, they are not found among the great men in the limelight, who imagine that they are directing events, but rather among the obscure officers like Captain Tushin, who changed the course of a battle by keeping his battery firing on his own initiative and in defiance of orders to evacuate his position. In this context, the puzzling question arises, if great men are really small, how can small men be great? For there is a contradiction between Tolstoy's

fatalistic view of historical events and the place which he assigns to personal free-will, a conflict more fundamental than his inborn and temperamental oscillation between joyful hedonism and ascetic self-denial. In *War and Peace* the blind forces governing life and nature seem to lie outside the human being and remain unknown to him, though they continue to govern his actions, however proudly he builds up the illusion that he is a free agent.

Anna Karenina is the epic of *War and Peace* continued in the more tortuous, highly strung society of the later nineteenth century. The same broad framework contrasts the life-stories of related noble families, but *Anna Karenina* is in some ways an even greater work of art; with all the mature qualities of *War and Peace*, it is less diffuse, more tensely concentrated in fewer though even more complex characters and significant scenes. Whatever didactic moralizing intention Tolstoy may have started with, this melts away in the consuming passion of the story and does not mar its artistic integrity. Preconceived ideas of conventional human justice are swept aside by the greater sense of inner fatality in every step shaping the tragic destiny of Anna. When someone expressed surprise that the beautiful, loving, and intelligent Anna could have ended by throwing herself under a railway train, Tolstoy is said to have replied, 'My heroes and heroines are apt to behave quite differently from what I could wish them to do', and Dostoevsky wrote about this novel that it demonstrated so clearly that the laws governing a human soul are still quite unknown, mysterious, untouched by science.

Meanwhile Tolstoy was undergoing the experiences

described in his *Confession* (1882). Both his efficiently administered estates and his new editions were bringing in an expanding income, but in his new state of mind he could not find any satisfying explanation to justify the wealth and privileges which he enjoyed. A violent shift of emphasis took place from the creative to the analytical side of his personality, and from this time till he ran away from his own home in search of poverty and solitude, Tolstoy wrote principally as a rational moralist. This did not prevent him from producing some magnificent discursive prose, e.g. *What is Art?* (1897), several plays and a number of remarkable imaginative works such as *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* (1882), *The Kreutzer Sonata* (1888), and *Resurrection* (1899); though the last two are arid and monotonous compared with his earlier fiction, they should not be ignored. He also wrote during this time, principally for peasant readers, a large number of peasant and folk stories, many of which, but by no means all, are tedious moralizing parables. His wife wrote of him then how he had grown greyer, weaker in health, quieter and sadder than before. She regretfully but firmly resented his new doctrines, in which she saw a mixture of mental aberration, senile decay, and shameful neglect of duty to his family. It is probably owing to her that the atmosphere of Tolstoy's house in Yasnaya Polyana as it was in the last years of his life (now perfectly preserved in its original state by the Academy of Sciences for the Soviet Government) is full of a noble simplicity and serene domestic charm, but is free from that harsher monastic asceticism towards which Tolstoy himself vainly aspired.

It is impossible here to do more than outline those doctrines which he expounded in the wonderfully lucid and compact prose of his didactic works, and which, far more than his artistic genius, made him the centre of a new world-cult and one of the most famous international figures of his day. 'Tolstoyism' has been as much distorted by its adherents as by its detractors. It was more than a negative and narrow rationalization of Christianity put into practice, and centred round the command: 'Thou shalt not oppose evil by violence.' Tolstoy thought he had found in the best type of Russian peasant a concrete example of the true religious life, but he believed firmly in resisting force and other evils by every means short of physical violence. He was an indefatigable champion of the pacifist Doukhobors, that industrious peasant sect which was persecuted by one Tsar after another, constantly facing death, floggings, or exile rather than submit to service in the Imperial army, and it was owing to his efforts and financial aid that thousands of them were enabled to emigrate to Canada. Tolstoy set the peasant above the landowner as a starting-point, rather than an accomplished model of self-perfection. To him the peasant's superiority consisted above all in his unperverted simplicity and capacity for religious feeling. With all his ignorance and squalor, he was already higher than the romanticized barbarian, the 'noble savage' of Rousseau, for he was potentially, much as the Slavophils had shown him, a member of a cultured rural community, with a rich tradition of folklore and music—illiterate, of course, but how can true culture be measured in terms of literacy?

Moreover, the ideal Christian peasant of Russia was only one ingredient in Tolstoyism; it contained other elements nearer to Buddhism and the teaching of Spinoza than to Christianity, notably in its resolute rejection of all supernatural doctrine and its belief in self-sulfilment through self-denying love, pursued for its own sake and not in the hope of any divine reward. 'When a change takes place in man's thought, action follows the direction of thought as inevitably as a ship follows the direction given by its rudder.' (*Non-Acting*, 1893.) There is not a shred of metaphysical web-spinning or other-worldliness in Tolstoy's philosophy, and the titles alone of some of his later essays, *What is to be done?* (1906), *Bethink Yourselves* (1904), *Why Do Men Stupefy Themselves?* (1890) demonstrate his constant preoccupation with action—and what is more, with any and every action down to the seemingly most trivial ones. In attacking even the slight intoxication produced by the moderate consumption of alcohol and tobacco, he wrote: 'It seems to people that a slight stupefaction, a little darkening of the judgment, cannot have any important influence. But to think so is like supposing it may harm a watch to be struck against a stone, but that a little dirt introduced into it cannot be harmful. . . . Boundless results of boundless unimaginable importance may follow from the most minute alterations occurring in the field of consciousness. . . . People are inclined to cease to think at the point at which thought begins to be difficult, but it is just then, I would add, that thinking begins to be fruitful. A man feels that to decide the questions confronting him needs labour—and he wishes to evade this. If

he had no means of stupefying his faculties he could not expel from his conscience the questions that confront him, and the necessity of solving them would be forced upon him.'

Tolstoy condemned most of contemporary science and urban civilization on equally practical grounds. They did not stand up to his test of increasing human happiness—rather the reverse. 'All the practical results of the victories over nature have till now gone to factories which injure the workman's health, have produced weapons to kill men and increased luxury and corruption.' 'Our science in order to be really useful must return to the only reasonable and fruitful conception of science, which is that the object of science is to show people how they ought to live.' (*Modern Science*, 1898.) What Tolstoy urged was that science should serve different ends, not that its researches should be abolished.

His disapproval of culture and art has been even more widely misunderstood than his attitude to science. The art which he condemned was the artificial, debased, sensational, but most prevalent kind of art, which pandered to the jaded senses of a growing number of half-educated people. Such wretched substitutes could in no way satisfy Tolstoy's criterion of genuine art that it should communicate religious feeling from one person to another. His final scorn for his own great imaginative works contains a familiar element of self-castigation, which should be discounted, for it pricked Tolstoy's conscience that his main motive in starting to write had been personal pride and desire for fame.

The essence of what Tolstoy meant, when he drew his distinctions between true and false art in

literature, can be found in his highly controversial essay on Shakspere, *Shakspere and the Drama* (1906). Though very few people have accepted his analysis or conclusions as valid, this essay is the most noteworthy instance of Tolstoy's application to literature of his final criterion of artistic values. 'My disagreement with the established opinion about Shakspere is not the result of a casual mood or of a lighthearted attitude towards the subject, but it is the result of repeated and strenuous efforts extending over many years to harmonize my view with the opinions about Shakspere accepted throughout the whole educated Christian world. . . . For a long time I distrusted my judgment, and to check my conclusions I have repeatedly during the last fifty years set to work to read Shakspere in all possible forms—in Russian, in English and in German. I read the tragedies, comedies and historical plays several times over, and I invariably experienced the same feelings, repulsion, weariness and bewilderment.' Tolstoy then analyses act by act one of Shakspere's most enthusiastically admired tragedies, *King Lear*, and he reaches the following conclusions, which—however much they are disagreed with—deserve attention because they define so clearly what he considered to be the main symptoms of literature devoid of true art. The positions in which the characters in *King Lear* are quite arbitrarily placed are so unnatural that the reader or spectator is unable either to sympathize with their sufferings or even to be interested in what he reads or hears. The characters speak, not an individual language of their own, but always one and the same Shakspelian affected unnatural language, which not only

could they not speak, but which no real people could ever have spoken anywhere. They talk at great length about quite irrelevant matters, guided more by the sound of words and by puns than by thought—and they all talk alike. Lear raves just as Edgar does when feigning madness. By the character of the speech it is impossible to know who is speaking. Shakspere's characters continually do and say not merely what is unnatural to them, but what is quite arbitrary and senseless. Examples of this abound in *King Lear* with the madness of several characters, the murders, the plucking out of eyes, poisonings and torrents of abuse. Everything is melodramatically exaggerated, the speeches, the actions of the characters and their consequences; there is no sense of proportion. Tolstoy goes so far as to say that sincerity is totally absent in Shakspere's works. It seemed to him that Shakspere did not believe in what he was saying, but played with words, and that his artificiality was deliberate. Moreover, he could not escape from the impression of an underlying provincial snobbery, from the suspicion that many of Shakspere's plays expound a vulgar view of life which extols kings and princes, especially English ones, and regards the external elevation of the great ones of the earth as a genuine personal superiority, while despising humble people.

Tolstoy explains the over-estimation of Shakspere as due to the German aesthetic critics after Goethe—themselves men devoid of any aesthetic feeling—who began to belaud the whole of Shakspere indiscriminately. Eleven thousand volumes were written about him, and his fame kept on growing like a snowball. In short, the religious

essence, which Tolstoy believed was indispensable for a true dramatic literature, did not exist in Shakspere's work. But Tolstoy did *not* mean that he preferred morality plays to Shakspere, and he anticipated critics in this sense when he wrote, 'Is not what you demand for the drama, religious instruction, didactics—what is called a *tendency*—which is incompatible with true art? By the religious essence of art, I reply, I mean not an external inculcation of any religious truth in artistic guise, and not an allegorical representation of those truths, but the expression of a definite view of life corresponding to the highest religious understanding of a given period, an outlook which, serving as the impelling motive for the composition of the drama, permeates the whole work, though the author be unconscious of it.' (*Shakspere and the Drama*.)

Though Tolstoy had made over his property to his wife, the incompatibility of his secure and comfortable existence with the doctrines which he preached in later years weighed more and more heavily on his conscience. He ended by walking out of his house at Yasnaya Polyana, intending to become a homeless religious wanderer like a Buddhist monk, and he left a note for his wife asking her to forgive him as he forgave her and not to try to deflect him from his final purpose. He died a few days later at the Astapovo railway station (November 1910).

Theodore M. Dostoevsky (1821-81), was born in Moscow in a municipal hospital where his father was a doctor. His parents lived modestly, but not in abject poverty, and his father owned a small estate with a few serfs. Dostoevsky was educated

at the Military Engineer's School in St. Petersburg, took a commission there in 1841, but left the service in 1844. Whereas Tolstoy found his main literary nourishment from the West in Rousseau and Stendhal, Dostoevsky in his youth devoured the works of Georges Sand, Balzac, Hoffman, and the French socialist, Fourier. His first novel, *Poor People* (1845), whose principal character is a wretched copying-clerk (a prototype of Gogol's), won him the warm approbation of Belinsky and Nekrasov, and hence of the 'advanced' reading public. His much more remarkable novel, *The Double*, which appeared soon afterwards, a study of split personality, did not strike the appropriate chord of straightforward humanitarianism to which the leading critics were then keyed up. They therefore received it coldly as a disappointing failure of early promise. Meanwhile Dostoevsky was frequenting the socialist Petrashevsky circle, which became politically suspect under the intensified police rigour following the 1848 rebellions in Europe. In the next year its members were arrested, and the majority, including Dostoevsky, sentenced to death. While standing in the row of condemned men in the Semyonovsky Square, awaiting his turn to be executed, he heard his reprieve read out a minute before he was due to die. His sentence was commuted to four years' hard labour in Siberia.

Haunting descriptions of what is felt by a man condemned to death burst out at intervals in Dostoevsky's works, notably in *The Idiot*, but the main record of his experiences during these years is disguised as fiction in his *Memoirs from the House of the Dead* (1861). This amazingly objective record

deserves to be studied as the clue to much of Dostoevsky's later creative work and to his specialization in abnormal types. For a man of his thoughtful imaginative power, closely observing these murderers, thieves, monomaniacs, and perverts, could find in them a living illustration of certain human characteristics carried to extremes, such as rarely emerge in the more stereotyped people moulded in response to prevailing social standards and to a greater extent slaves of habit. Unsentimental and undismayed, Dostoevsky deplored the waste of human strength and talent going to ruin in the penal settlement at Omsk, but two negative things struck him most forcibly in the majority of his fellow-convicts; they did not show the smallest sign of any shame or repentance, and they invariably hated and distrusted anyone not of their own class. There was not even honour among thieves, and he noted how they habitually cursed and robbed each other, and how those not already depraved on arrival became depraved in the process of penal servitude. They never spoke of their crimes and counted it the greatest virtue to be astonished at nothing. Of one convict, a former official, who had run into debt and murdered his old father, Dostoevsky wrote: 'He was perfectly cheerful and gay the whole time I was with him.' He came to the conclusion that prison and forced labour only intensify in the criminal an ineradicable hatred, a thirst for forbidden pleasures and a terrible cynicism. Of their general attitude to the higher-class political prisoners like himself, he wrote: 'They gloated over our sufferings which we tried to conceal. We were not, certainly to start with, as strong and efficient as they were in physical labour.'

There is nothing harder than to win the people's confidence and earn their sympathy.' There were, of course, certain exceptional types. One of the best was the 'old believer', who was suffering for his faith. He had resisted the proselytizing efforts of the government and set fire to a new orthodox church built in his district. He was an orderly well-to-do merchant with a wife and children, whom he knew he would never see again, and no one could understand how this peaceful mild man could have committed such an act of fanatical violence. But Dostoevsky's main solace from the numbed sense of humanity around him was in his appreciation of the generous flow of gifts which reached the convicts from sympathetic people of every kind. 'The highest class of our society has no idea how the merchants, small middle-class, and common people, took care of us "unfortunates",' he wrote.

It is said that Dostoevsky's book helped to bring about some of the Russian prison reforms of the 'sixties. Though he himself recorded no personal indictment against the authorities who sent him into penal servitude, we should, remembering the powers of censorship, draw no final conclusions about his actual state of mind. Nevertheless, having entered prison as a young radical intellectual, he came out of it a deeply religious man (though racked by fits of scepticism), a champion of the Orthodox Church, and so much preoccupied with exploring the inner recesses of the human personality that he paid little further attention to mere political questions.

Both *The House of the Dead* and his immediately following and inferior novel, *The Insulted and*

Injured, were published in the monthly periodical *Time*, which was started and edited by Dostoevsky and his brother Michael in 1861. It got into trouble with the censorship but was re-started in 1864 under a new name, *The Epoch*. Then Michael Dostoevsky died, the journal became encumbered with debts, and Dostoevsky had to disappear abroad to Germany in order to escape from his creditors. In these appalling years he was half-starving, riddled with debts, attacked by epileptic fits, and afflicted by the recent death of his first wife and of his brother Michael. He was on one occasion obliged to pawn his last clothes in order to pay for telegrams to his publisher. Yet he never lost heart, described himself as only just beginning to live, and spoke of his cat-like vitality. Indeed this was the period of his most intense literary activity. *Memoirs from Underground* (a morbidly effective exercise in psycho-analysis) appeared in 1864, *Crime and Punishment* in 1866, *The Idiot* in 1869, and *The Possessed* in 1871.

Crime and Punishment is the story of a criminal who, unlike most of Dostoevsky's fellow-convicts at Omsk, could not escape from his conscience. Raskolnikov, though obsessed by one idea, was of course no simple criminal, but an intellectual student who had persuaded himself that for an intelligent man to kill a parasitic old money-lender and make good use of her wealth was no crime but a virtue. It turns out that the subconscious moral sense can be stronger than the intellect, for after the murder Raskolnikov has to fight even harder to suppress his horrible memories than he had previously fought to justify his project. One could not say that he feels remorse; he is overwhelmed by a confused crowd of

feelings, the most galling of which is the shame of discovering himself to be so weak and so easy a prey to inward reproaches. As a sheer gesture of bravado he seeks the company of the police, and they, guessing his secret, play with him like cats with a mouse. His moral regeneration is only made possible by Sonia, the prostitute who had sold herself to prevent her family from starving. She is genuinely attached to him as the one man who had shown respect to her, and she struggles to relieve him of the terrible secret which she feels is on his mind. There is no ordinary love, but a love penetrated on both sides by a sense of guilty despair, for which it seeks expiation in further suffering. Through her influence Raskolnikov denounces himself to the police, and having shared his secret, she voluntarily accompanies him to Siberia to share his punishment.

What makes a murderer denounce himself? This question recurs at intervals in Dostoevsky's work, and he answers it by pointing to something in the human personality which is even stronger than the fear of punishment or than the natural desire to enjoy the fruits of a crime. Dostoevsky's most terrifying potential criminals are the most intellectual of his characters, not men like the gentle young soldier Sirotkin, who in a sudden fit of furious revolt bayoneted his brutal inspecting officer, but like Raskolnikov or Kirilov (in *The Possessed*), men without faith or love, possessed by abstract ideas which acquire the force of passions and drag them over the edge of an abyss. 'A friend of humanity, with an unstable moral foundation, is an ogre of humanity . . . if you hurt his vanity, he is ready to set fire to the world out of petty vengeance.' (*The*

Idiot.) Though *Crime and Punishment* aroused interest, its deeper sense escaped the critics, most of whom cherished a narrow political attitude to literature, and some of the Radicals accused Dostoevsky of being a 'reactionary,' who wanted to spread the impression that all students were murderers and thieves like Raskolnikov.

Prince Mishkin in *The Idiot* is the opposite pole to Raskolnikov, and the nearest approach to a convincing and complete individual portrait of Dostoevsky's religious ideal. Prince Mishkin is a nineteenth-century reincarnation of the 'wise fool' of Russian folklore; he is called an 'idiot' because his epilepsy and extreme nervous sensibility made it impossible for him to lead what was called a normal life in ordinary society. Dostoevsky removes this pure, fervent, quixotic soul from the seclusion of a Swiss sanatorium and plunges him into the seething whirlpool of Moscow. Though he has none of the common defensive weapons of conceit, ambition, and cunning, even the hardened scoundrels who pounce on and surround him there are subdued by the unexpected weapon of his naïve wisdom; but his power of action is restricted, and to the love which he inspires in two women he can only respond with a patient sympathy and kindness. One of these women, Nastasya Filippovna, is a supreme example of the divided personality which haunts all Dostoevsky's work. The action of the novel unfolds in her a tragic conflict between two equally powerful sentiments, pride and moral sensibility. For her to accept the advances of the wild merchant Rogojin is a conscious step lower in the mire and ruin to which she feels she is condemned by her previous

immoral life, and while accepting him, she revolts inwardly against him. But her pride would not allow her to marry Prince Mishkin, whose sympathy she resented as something insulting, sincere though it was, because she felt bound to acknowledge his moral superiority. 'Her pride will never forgive me for my love,' said the prince. 'She ran away to prove to me that she is a street-woman. Maybe in that extreme acknowledgment of shame, there is for her some terrible unnatural pleasure, as if she were taking her revenge on someone.' Irresistibly drawn to Mishkin by her yearning for a pure love, she is as powerfully repelled by the sense of her own unworthiness and by her pride. In her relations with Rogojin, the sinister force of his savage possessive and jealous passion, bordering on madness, is made credible and almost comprehensible, and the climax of the novel, when after murdering Nastasya, he sits through the night talking to Mishkin, is one of the most moving passages in the whole of Dostoevsky.

Mishkin is an epileptic, and the novel describes the sudden ecstatic happiness and power of intuition which flow into him in the few seconds preceding an epileptic attack, but these attacks only occur as a result of some painful emotional disturbance, and one is left to infer than he might have been cured altogether if he had not become entangled in the mesh of jealousy, misery, and hatred which surrounded him after his return to Russia. What distinguishes him most from the other characters is not his physical abnormality, but the fact that he is the only one of them entirely free from personal ambition or vanity, and who has a spontaneous flow of active sympathy. In his love for Nastasya

Filipovna, in his friendship for his rival, Rogojin, he felt their profound unhappiness as if it were his own. After Nastasya's murder, he could bear no more, and madness mercifully took possession of him. *The Idiot* is replete with instances of Dostoevsky's belief in the irrational, in waves of chaotic elemental forces at the source of human action. 'The law of self-destruction and the law of self-preservation are equally strong in human beings,' said one of the characters (Lebedev). But in both these processes wholly involuntary feelings, which govern actions often quite contrary to self-interest or reason, play a leading part in Dostoevsky's world.

The Possessed is a prolix and chaotic novel, chiefly remarkable for its original treatment of various kinds of revolutionary as seen through Dostoevsky's eyes. We find strange Russian versions of universal human types; the simple religious man turned inside out and putting his religious fervour in the service of atheism, the convinced intellectual pessimist, desperate, without principles, on the road to suicide, the spoilt adventurer who becomes a revolutionary in order to escape from intolerable boredom. Endless conversations and fantastic projects for human happiness and social reform revolve round the problem of liberty. But Dostoevsky implied that the main force of the revolutionary movement lay neither in the appeal of its ideas, nor in its organization, but in the sheer driving passion for power of a few leading men to whom the weaker members gladly submitted themselves, and who could easily vanquish any number of timid, irresolute opponents.

Though he hated slavery, Dostoevsky was

frightened of too much liberty, for he saw that liberty could easily sink into licence, run amok, or undermine sound reason, social advantage, and religion. Indeed, his whole attitude to socialism hinged on its inseparable link in his mind with atheism, hatred, and violence. He saw it as a European product which, like atheism, had been born from despair, to take the place of the lost moral power of a debased Christian religion, whose decline, he said, was due to the spiritual impotence and political crimes of the Catholic Church. In a letter to Liubimov, editor of the *Russian Messenger*, he wrote: 'Bread, the tower of Babel and the completest overthrow of freedom of conscience—that is what the desperate denier and atheist arrive at. The only difference is that our socialists are conscious Jesuits and liars, who will not confess that their ideal is the violation of man's conscience and the reduction of mankind to the level of a herd of cattle. And they do all this in the name of love of mankind, as if to say, Christ's law is difficult and abstract, and for weak people intolerable; instead of the law of liberty and enlightenment, they bring to mankind the law of chains and of subjection by means of bread.' Verkhovensky's words in *The Possessed* about Shigalev's schemes for social reform go even farther. 'With him every member of society watches his neighbour and is compelled to inform on him. Every person belongs to the whole community . . . all are slaves, and all are equal in slavery.' Since Dostoevsky, like Tolstoy, had no faith in political solutions for any fundamental human problems, his attitude to socialism is only a natural outcome of his religious convictions. He was disgusted by the notorious Nekhayev affair,

involving the murder of a student by revolutionaries, and parts of *The Possessed* were said to be based on this incident. Painfully aware of the desperate and wildly destructive activities of his socialist contemporaries, he did not appear to believe in the more constructive side of their aspirations for the future.

In his last and longest novel, *The Brothers Karamazov* (1879-80), Dostoevsky incorporated the outcome of all his mature reflections on Russian life. The three brothers represent three separate, co-existing, but still unco-ordinated trends of development in Russian society. The wild, impulsive generous-hearted Mitya fails through lack of self-control, the brilliant but sinister Ivan is spoiled by intellectual pride; only the gentle religious Alyosha, a sane version of the 'idiot' Prince Mishkin, is favoured as the central figure bearing the fertile seeds of future creation. More actively beneficent than the saintly doctrinaire Zosima, who lives in austere contemplation shut away in his monastery, Alyosha, like the Bodhisatva of Buddhist legend, voluntarily returns from seclusion to live in the world, to impart to its sick and misguided inhabitants the healing touch of his own spiritual health and virtue. A single false intonation could easily have turned Alyosha into a prig, but in Dostoevsky's hands he manages to remain a sincere and attractive human being, even though Mitya's more exuberant personality excites a wider sympathy. With all his virtues, Alyosha is not too dogmatically or blindly Christian. Ivan's story of the Russian general, who had a little serf-boy torn to pieces by dogs before his mother's eyes, forces Alyosha to admit that such a man should be shot and not forgiven.

The murder of the monstrous old Karamazov rids the world of a creature as useless and evil as the odious female moneylender in *Crime and Punishment*, but the rational justification of the crime is again undermined by the irrational protests of the conscience and with even more far-reaching ramifications. Mitya feels morally guilty of murdering his father because he had at times definitely *wished* to kill him; Ivan is eventually driven to throw the guilt on himself by the intolerable pain of his own knowledge that he had planted the *idea* of murder in the brain of the degenerate Smerdyakov, who actually committed it. And Smerdyakov hangs himself before his guilt is even discovered. The effect of this novel is overpowering, and in places bewildering; troubled and cloudy passions, like molten lava, are interspersed with powerful intricate but rambling philosophical and religious arguments. In spite of its tremendous length, it was only intended as a prelude to a much longer novel planned by Dostoevsky, but never accomplished.

It is generally supposed that Dostoevsky's tortured genius was incapable of laughter or any form of humour; certainly his humour is not unmixed with sardonic and macabre enjoyment, but it distinctly exists. His story *Uncle's Dream* (1859), which has been magnificently dramatized for the Moscow Art Theatre, is an almost hilarious picture of provincial society, in which an ambitious matchmaker tries to marry off her daughter to a decrepit and nearly half-witted prince. One of his least-known stories, *The Crocodile*, expresses a topical sarcasm in a comic vein, and illustrates this aspect of Dostoevsky's talent. A government official who visits a

travelling zoo inspects a crocodile too closely and pays the penalty of his curiosity when the monster swallows him whole. Controversy ensues as to whether the crocodile should be cut open or not. The chief defendant of the crocodile points out, 'We are making efforts to attract foreign capital into the country, and now judge for yourself. The capital of the crocodile-keeper (a foreigner attracted here) has barely had time to become doubled by means of Ivan Matveyich, and we, instead of protecting the foreign possessor of property, are aiming on the contrary to rip open the belly of the fundamental capital itself. Ivan Matveyich, as a true son of the fatherland, should even be glad and proud that by the addition of himself he has doubled and maybe trebled the value of the foreign crocodile. That, sir, is an essential feature in the attraction of capital. If one man succeeds, perhaps another will come with a crocodile, and a third will bring two or three at once, and capital will collect round them.' Someone then asks whether Ivan Matveyich, if he has to stay inside the crocodile, could be paid a salary for collecting facts about his digestion, and internal processes. 'You say *facts*; in any case we're crowded out with facts and don't know what to do with them all. Moreover, how can a man be in government service if he is lying down? There is no precedent for it. If with the introduction of live crocodiles, government servants begin to disappear and begin to demand commissions to live inside them, you must admit it will be a bad example.' Meanwhile the civil servant has himself decided that it is very peaceful, agreeable, and warm inside the crocodile, and that he would do well to stay there. He prepares to settle

down and expresses the hope to live there at least a thousand years (if crocodiles live so long), which would give him ample time to think out beneficial ideas for communication to the statesmen and journalists of St. Petersburg.

Though Dostoevsky wrote about himself much less than Tolstoy, there are, of course, passages in his novels which indicate the development of his own emotional life and thought through the medium of his characters. Already in the early days in St Petersburg before his arrest he wrote of himself as a 'passionate connoisseur of mysteries'. In describing the miserable attics, sombre cellars and their ordinary inhabitants, he never descended to a crude naturalistic physiology of St. Petersburg but remained a visionary, descrying these everyday prosaic things in an extraordinary and fantastic light, flashed through in brilliant glimpses which were an escape from the heavy gloom with which they alternated. 'Boredom, sadness, and apathy and a feverish convulsive expectation of something better, torment me,' he wrote in one of his letters. Certain expectations are fulfilled in the moment experienced by Prince Mishkin in *The Idiot*, when 'amid the sadness, spiritual darkness, and oppression all his faculties awoke at once, suddenly lighting up his mind with an amazing burst of flame; the sensation of life and his own self-consciousness multiplied tenfold in those moments, which arose and passed away like flashes of lightning. His mind and heart were filled with unusual brightness; all excitements, all doubts and anxieties, were calmed at once, and resolved into a state of elevated serenity full of lucid harmonious joy and hope, full of reason.'

and final justification.' Kirilov in *The Possessed* also talks of such moments and adds: 'We must change bodily or die. If it lasted longer than five seconds, the soul would not stand it and must expire. In those five seconds I live, and I would give my whole life for them, because they are worth it. In order to last for ten seconds, we should need to be physically transformed.'

Dostoevsky, a 'novelist of ideas', was greater as an artist than as a philosopher, but both his imagery and his thought yield to the personal religious mysticism with which they are tinted throughout. Even his deepest and sanest intellectual character, Ivan Karamazov, reaches an irrational conclusion when he says: 'Let me not believe in life, lose faith in the order of nature, be convinced that everything is a chaotic accursed and devilish chaos, let me be appalled by all the horrors of human disillusion, and I will want to live nevertheless.' And his brother Dmitri agrees with him; he is ready to endure anything so long as he can say 'I exist', and 'even if I do not see the sun, I know that it exists'.

The persistent thirst for life at any price, even though it be the tortured prey of dark and senseless forces, is the only constant motive which survives the clash of passions and contradictory metaphysical speculations, which reached their climax in *The Brothers Karamazov*. One feels that the strength of Dostoevsky's faith alone enabled him to believe that the violent and apparently insoluble contradictions with which he grappled, individual self-assertion against self-abnegation, nationalism against cosmopolitanism, materialistic socialism against religion, were somehow in the last resort not absolutely irreconcilable.

Parts of Dostoevsky's *Diary of a Writer* crystallize his more concrete thought on several contemporary issues. He insisted on the deep internal disparity between Russia and Europe, and on the sphinx-like inscrutability of Russia to Europeans. 'Even the moon has been more positively analysed by Europeans than has Russia.' 'We have no class interests', he wrote, 'because, strictly speaking, we have no classes, because the Russian spirit is broader than class enmity, class interests, and class rights. Our new Russia has understood that there is only one cement, one soil which unites all Russians, that is a general spiritual reconciliation the basis of which is in education. She knows she has already finished with your European education and is starting a new immeasurably broader life.' In Europe, he pointed out, the serfs were not liberated by their owners, as they were in Russia, but by revolt, fire, sword, and blood. The Russian people, he claimed, should be judged less by what they are than by what they aspire to be; they were at least free from that angularity, self-satisfaction and self-centredness, which vitiated the further development of the rival European nations.

The key to Russian moral superiority and human solidarity lay for Dostoevsky in the binding force of the Orthodox church. He compared the more genuine, personal, and inward orthodox faith with the 'prejudiced, strident, and cruel clericalism' of the European churches. His letters to the poet Maykov, and to Pobyedonostsev, the Procurator of the Holy Synod, develop this special religious line of thought. It was by virtue of the altruistic orthodox faith engrafted on a vigorous national character

that Dostoevsky saw Russia as the natural champion of other Slav and orthodox peoples, who, without such a strong uniting and supporting power, might soon exhaust themselves in internal dissensions. Consequently the Slav idea for Dostoevsky, because of its main association with a broadening religious faith, ceased to be narrowly Slavophil or pan-Slav. 'For us Russians', he wrote, 'there are two fatherlands, Russia and Europe . . . Russia at the head of the united Slavs will give her new, healthy, and hitherto unheard message. That word will be spoken . . . uniting nations in a new brotherly and peaceful union, the foundations of which lie in the Slav genius, and principally in the spirit of the Russian people, suffering for so long, for so long condemned to silence, but always containing within itself great forces for the future solution of many bitter and fatal misunderstandings in west-European civilization.'

Dostoevsky's utterances about the future of his country have received various oracular interpretations in the light of subsequent events, and his thought as a whole shows a baffling fluidity even in its most practical implications. It is, however, beyond dispute that he was singularly uninfluenced by all the class and political prejudices of his day, and on account of this uncompromising freedom of outlook and of his apparent self-contradictions, he earned the hostility and distrust of all the major political parties and intellectual groups. But when he died in February 1881, the place that he occupied in the hearts of many people was demonstrated by the thousands of spontaneous participants in his funeral ceremony, which took place at the height of the

'Nihilist' terrorism, only a month before the murder of Alexander II. Though every section of the community, from the Imperial family to the revolutionary groups, was represented, there was no attempt at any political demonstration, such as the government feared, and eye-witnesses have described the tense atmosphere of the ceremony as one in which all were united and lifted for a moment *out of themselves* in their deep feeling of tribute to Dostoevsky's genius.

VI

MINOR WRITERS IN FICTION,
POETRY AND DRAMA

A NUMBER of nineteenth-century Russian authors of outstanding creative talent have been excessively overshadowed—especially in the estimation of foreigners—by the great literary giants of the same period. The contribution of N. Leskov (1831–95), was as different from the artistic literature of the manor-house as it was from the mainly sociological writings of the rising middle class. Descended from a family of clergy, Leskov was prevented by poverty from receiving a regular university education. He worked for some years in a government office in Kiev, and afterwards as an agent on the estates of Count Perovsky, thus acquiring a sound practical observation of provincial people and their mode of life. His two early novels, *No Way Out* and *At Daggers Drawn*, showed the Nihilists in an unfavourable light, consequently damning him as a reactionary in the eyes of the radical press critics. His best-known novel, *Cathedral Folk*, is an eventful narrative, giving a vigorous and at times boisterous rendering of life among the Russian clergy. But Leskov's brisk, anecdotal descriptive style is most at home in the short story, the only literary form in which he truly excelled. Here one of his favourite figures is the Russian 'bogatir' (an untranslatable word, meaning a brave, powerful, and generous-minded hero of popular legend). An excellent example occurs in the hero of the story *The Enchanted*

Wanderer, a simple-minded, kindly Russian peasant, who, after starting as a stable-boy on his master's estate, wanders through Russia, plunging into one adventure after another. His character is far from being idealized, but his crudity, violence, and bouts of drunkenness are largely redeemed by his astonishing strength, courage, and good humour.

Perhaps the most individual feature of Leskov's stories is his interest in the Russian craftsman as a type with unrecognized creative gifts and a strongly marked personality. This feature is well rendered in *The Sealed Angel*, describing among the 'old believers' the enthusiastic connoisseurs of ikon-painting and their daring execution of plans to recover a treasured image which had been confiscated. The *Story of the Left-handed Smith of Tula and the Steel Flea* is one of the most original and humorous examples of Leskov's talent for the boldly conceived popular tale. Its theme is again the prowess and skill of the Russian craftsman, this time in a bid to overtake and surpass an elaborate invention of English craftsmanship. The story tells of a visit to England of a Russian Emperor accompanied by a Don Cossack, who tries to discourage his master from an exaggerated admiration of foreign products. The Emperor nevertheless cannot resist buying in London a steel flea, which had the extraordinary property of dancing when wound up, and was so minute that it could only be properly seen through a microscope. The Emperor's successor sends the steel flea to Tula with a message to the craftsmen of that town saying that he relied on them to prove that they were not inferior to foreign workmen. The Tula smiths rose to the occasion by nailing

miniature horse-shoes on to the flea's microscopic feet; only they forgot to take into account that the additional weight would upset the delicate mechanism which enabled the flea to dance. An undertone hints at the utter uselessness of such a flea, except as a demonstration of technical virtuosity, and the main narrative is interwoven with a series of quite arbitrary misfortunes, including the death of the Russian master-craftsman in England; these combine to produce an ironical impression of the wanton misdirection and waste of talented individuals, though great talent existed, and somehow found its own way to fruition. The story ends in a nostalgic but sober comparison with the effects of the industrial age. 'Such master-craftsmen as the legendary left-handed smith cannot, of course, be found in Tula to-day; machines have evened out the inequality of talent and skill, and genius does not exhaust itself in the fight against industrious persistence and accuracy. While benefiting the increase of earnings, machines have not benefited artistic creativeness, which sometimes went beyond all bounds, inspiring the popular imagination to produce what are now fabulous legends.' This story is also a good specimen of that idiomatic popular language and racy turn of phrase—more comprehensible to Russians than to foreigners—for which Leskov has been particularly praised by some connoisseurs of Russian literature.

More distinctive both in the depth and range of his talent was V. Korolenko (1853-1921), the son of a Russian judge and a Polish lady. His literary work revealed a unique capacity for radical idealism invigorated by a scientific backbone, and for

blending ethical aims with the lights and shades of imagery drawn from the closest observation of nature. Despite his many tribulations he preserved that warm kindness and faith in individual human beings, characteristic of the better populists. This attitude, enlivened by a quiet humorous intelligence, permeates his best stories and his most substantial single work, a veiled autobiography called *The History of my Contemporary*. While still a student he was arrested for belonging to a secret political organization and exiled to north-eastern Siberia, where he spent some years among the primitive Yakuts. His interpretation of their life and customs is beautifully rendered in the story *Makar's Dream*. Indeed, Korolenko's main inspiration arose from his experiences in Siberia, and even these radiate a mild sunset glow.

He forestalled Gorky in his pictures of vagabonds and beggars, and in his ability to see in them great qualities of mind and soul, which the utmost degradation brought out and could not crush. But he had none of Gorky's aggressiveness and hatred of settled society. A profound and active sense of compassion for all these unlucky people pervades Korolenko's stories. They vividly recreate that Russian scene of misfortune and poverty to which no social stigma was attached, but rather a certain sacred virtue, as in Asiatic countries, and where there was also a certain merit inherent in the generous donation of alms. The yellow-robed Buddhist monk of India and China who wandered forth into the homeless state, with only his stick and begging-bowl, found his Russian counterpart in the ragged Christian vagabonds who swarmed

through the land, and to whom the poorest peasant would never deny a crust of bread. Begging in the name of Christ was as much a religious right as to grant alms to the needy was a religious duty.

Constantly the stable and organized life of the settled peasant was upset by the thwarted craving for liberty bursting forth in the irrepressibly violent desire to move from place to place and from one occupation to another. In his story *Sakhalinets*, Korolenko shows a young convict, who has escaped from the penal settlement of Sakhalin, starting to lead a settled life on the land. This man agrees that it is better to work on the land than to rob, but the narrow monotonous life stifles him, and he is impelled to abandon it for more stimulating adventures.

Korolenko renders magnificently the impact of the Siberian climate and surroundings on its human inhabitants, the sense of vast overwhelming monotony and loneliness, the sudden bigness of small incidents. 'In the cold tense air, the slightest cracking of ice resounds like a shot, the fall of a stone makes a noise like an avalanche, a song grows into a tremendous fantastic thing in the imagination.' His work is sometimes overburdened by a plaintive emotional lyricism and longwindedness in descriptive detail, qualities which quickly irritate and weary the reader of to-day. His compact imaginative masterpiece, *The Blind Musician* (1886) has no such 'longueurs', and is the maturest expression of his particular kind of sympathetic insight.

It tells of a boy who is born blind, of how he conquers his infirmity and becomes a great musician. The story is deeply symbolic, and at the same time

extraordinarily sensitive and almost scientifically accurate in its picture of the blind boy's mental development. The author in his preface wrote, 'the fundamental psychological motive of this study consists in the instinctive organic craving for light'. The blind boy's Uncle Maxim, an old soldier of liberalism, who had fought with Garibaldi, has made up his mind to develop his nephew's capacity and self-confidence by every conceivable means, and he comes into conflict with the mother, who wants to shelter her son from everything which might painfully remind him of his blindness. The uncle says: 'A stupid solicitude, shielding him from the need to exert himself, will kill all his chances of a fuller life.' The boy, as often happens with blind people, was acutely sensitive to sound. 'The impressions of sound acquired a dominating significance in his life, sound forms became the principal forms of all his thoughts, the centre of his mental processes. He remembered songs, and listening to their enchanting phrases, learned to know their whole construction, and the sad, gay, or thoughtful melodies corresponding to his own moods.' A young girl, a child of his own age, becomes attached to him. 'There are people, seemingly predestined for the quiet heroism of love linked with sadness and zeal—people for whom these cares are an organic necessity constituting the very air which they breathe. Nature has given them serenity, without which the daily tasks of life are unthinkable, and nature's foresight has softened in them personal cravings and interests, subordinating these to their major qualities. . . . Pierre's little friend incorporated all the qualities of that type of person, so rarely brought

forth by education, but arising like a talent, like genius, in chosen natures.' But the clear-sighted uncle finds that the girl's sympathy and love do not prevent Pierre from brooding excessively over his own irreparable tragedy. He invites to the house a crowd of young people, whose lively arguments and plans for their future activities have a disturbing effect on the blind boy's restricted consciousness. 'Maxim deliberately with a merciless hand broke the first breach in that wall by which the boy's world till then had been enclosed.'

'The first roaring wave had already risen up and broken, and the boy's spiritual balance shook under the initial blow. Now he already felt cramped in that enchanted circle. The calm stillness, the lazy whispering and rustling of the old garden became wearisome to him. . . . The darkness spoke to him with new alluring voices, it beckoned with dim new images of a more enticing vitality.' He began to 'feel' sunshine, to recognize different intensities of light, and also to grasp through the medium of sounds a sense of spatial forms and directions. One day while he was out riding (an activity which his uncle insisted on), he heard the cry of a stork and the more distant tolling of a monastery bell. 'Pierre felt distinctly that on the side near the monastery the ground fell steeply, probably on to a river-bank. The sounds were wasted to him faintly and in snatches, giving him an aural impression of distance in which were flashes of something extended and indistinct, like for us normal-sighted people the glimpse of obscure outlines in an evening mist.' His Uncle Maxim manages to dissipate Pierre's self-absorption still further by bringing him into touch

with the more hopeless misery of blind beggars; and as his inward illumination grows brighter through compassion, his perception and talents as a musician, which first acquired substance when he realized that he was loved, become more firmly rooted and vigorous. Korolenko's quiet unsensational genre with its bracing and healthy objectivity is at its best in this story, the sad theme of which might in cruder hands have slipped so easily into a morbidly sentimental or enervating moral tale.

Gleb Uspensky (1840-1902) was a populist of humbler origin than Korolenko, and who, unlike his greater contemporary, lost his faith and later his reason. He won a tremendous reputation in his time for his densely packed factual descriptions of the transformation of the Russian village, but the bulk of his literary work was ephemeral, and strikes the reader of to-day as too heavily documentary and tendentious. After all the high hopes which had attended the act of emancipation, Uspensky saw the liberated serfs sinking lower than before and obviously incapable of benefiting by the responsibilities of liberty. This picture is unfolded at length in his very sincere novel, *The Power of the Land*, from

the following is a characteristic piece of dialogue: "Do tell me, Ivan, why you are drinking so much," I ask Ivan in one of those lucid moments when he comes to himself, repents his dreadful actions and ponders over his fate. Ivan draws a deep sigh and speaks with contrition, almost in a whisper, "I have humoured myself too much. I don't know what to think. We had better not speak of it. When I think it over I wish I were dead." "But why? Tell me." "Why, well it's all on account

of freedom; when I was living at the railroad station I had thirty-five roubles a month, and about ten men under me; I got an extra rouble in silver for every wagon. So I began to humour myself. When my father was alive, I never took a drop, he would have killed me if I had, he would have killed me with his own hands. . . . But when I had my freedom at the railway station I let myself loose . . . so it seems that freedom, easy living, plenty of money, just what is necessary for a man to establish himself, really cause his whole disorder, until he becomes a regular pig." At last Ivan fled back to his farm, begged his wife's forgiveness, and started to work on the land again with desperate energy.

The murder of Alexander II by revolutionaries had put an end to most hopes of orderly reform, and the reign of Alexander III (1881-94) ushered in a period of tense political severity, reflected in literature by a decline in the civic ideals of the 'seventies, and a groping towards the more inward cult of beauty and personal human understanding. V. Garshin (1855-88), who grew up in these years of bitter disillusion, is one of the few genuine pessimists in Russian literature; he was chiefly overwhelmed by the extreme moral sensitiveness of his own temperament. The son of an officer, he himself insisted on joining the army as a private soldier in the war with Turkey, because he could not bear to feel he was not fully sharing the burden with his compatriots. Nevertheless, his story *Four Days*, based on his experience as a soldier, is a poignant indictment of the senselessness and brutality of war and simultaneously a fatalistic acceptance of war's inevitability.

Nearly every story of Garshin's—and he only

wrote twenty altogether—reflects on the failure of human endeavour; though man's fight against malignant forces continues almost automatically. *The Toad and the Rose* is an extraordinary evocation of elemental evil gloating over the destruction of innocent beauty. The madmen fight hardest of all against evil, and even they fail. This is the theme of *The Red Flower*, one of Garshin's most powerful and pathetic stories. The madman imagines that the whole evil poisoning the world is concentrated inside the poppy flowers growing in the asylum yard, and that if he destroys these flowers—at the risk of his own life—he can save the world. Boundless sympathy for suffering and injustice was just as natural to Garshin as was his hopeless sense of human weakness and insufficiency. He himself was afflicted at intervals by the kind of mental derangement described in his *Red Flower*, believing that he had really discovered panaceas for human ills, and he ended by committing suicide.

There were, however, a few gifted Russian writers of this period who were not mere followers in the wake of their greater predecessors nor lost wanderers discouraged by their failure to find constructive outlets, but enterprising experimentalists who were able to create some positive characters evolving with a sense of purpose within the existing structure of society. Among the most notable of these was A. Sheller-Mikhailov (1838-1900). He had to earn his living by journalism and wrote over a hundred novels, many of them in serial form for the periodical *The Contemporary*. A few of these novels have real literary qualities, but the moralizing tone and obvious artistic mediocrity of the bulk of his work have

caused it to be unduly neglected. Sheller's father was of Estonian peasant origin, and his mother sprang from an impoverished noble family; so both by birth and upbringing he was eminently a 'raznochinet'; his sober and practical moral outlook was built up on the tradition of the radical intelligentsia, to which he added a marked tinge of Protestantism.

His novel *Rotten Marshes*, a kind of autobiography, pictures with moving psychological insight the struggle of a young man torn between the worldly pleasure-loving and the industrious petit-bourgeois spheres, and his gradual intellectual and moral stabilization as a result of his free choice. The story starts with a sketch of the boy's grandmother, when as an aristocratic girl, oppressed by her cold and formal surroundings in St. Petersburg, she was pining for a quiet free life full of sacred peace: 'This solemn peacefulness worked on the imagination of the girl like the austere simplicity of the dark Protestant churches on the traveller who has just left Rome and its theatrical religious ceremonies.' Instead of seeking relief in a religious life, she breaks with her family and marries a penniless young Englishman. Two children are born to her; a son who grows up into a handsome, worthless, talkative butterfly, and a daughter who marries a poor man and becomes the mother of the boy who is the hero of the novel. The boy, as soon as he started to think for himself, could not understand why his uncle's behaviour was such a sickening contrast to his beautiful phrases. 'The Russian man speaks of his honesty with pride, as if it were an achievement, not an obligation; a good Russian woman does not have

this quality.' When he started to read books he noticed that they sometimes contained the same thoughts as his uncle had expressed. 'Can it be that the authors of these books are *like* my uncle? In me grew up a lack of confidence in people's words.'

The death of his grandmother left on the boy a painful impression of her empty and aimless life, and with adolescent ardour he resolved that his generation would not thus vanish from the world without leaving a trace behind. At school he is saved from failure by an exceptional master, who is a real teacher and friend to his pupils, and he goes on to Moscow University with all the makings of a good citizen. 'Get to know them,' Sheller writes of the students, 'and do not inquire about their basic convictions; you need only know that they are convinced of the possibility of living honestly and live so. What does it matter to you if Rosenkampf is reputed to be a flaming Nihilist, so long as you know he is not a base blockhead repeating other peoples' phrases, but an intelligent scientist and a good man?' In this novel, as in others, Sheller showed the keenest interest in educational problems. He had himself, in 1861, founded a school for poor children and for teaching adults on Sundays, and his constant concern was lest the 'new people' of the rising generation should be insufficiently or wrongly educated for carrying out the hard tasks which faced them.

The time was past when the 'men of mixed ranks' were content to snatch at scraps of higher education and in other respects to imitate the behaviour of the great world, revolving round the court and higher

officialdom, where they felt unhappy misfits if their deportment or shaky command of French and ball-room dancing betrayed their social origin. Sheller's literary work asserted the civic and educational ideals of the more intelligent Russian middle class with no uncertain voice and without any lurking servility to other social conventions. He showed the typical Russian Radical's respect for literature's high calling when he wrote reproachfully, 'The public has been accustomed to see in fiction an amusement suitable for relaxation in moments of idle boredom—writers, stirred by the thirst for money or fame, dance in front of them till they break their bones; they send into action pistols, sticks, poison and robbery, anything to excite the nerves.' All his own novels are intended to be edifying, though they often defeat their purpose by tedious overpreaching, and the later ones, such as *If You Cut Down the Wood the Splinters Fly* and *The Sins of Others*, become less optimistic in tone.

Similar to Sheller-Mikhailov in his firm ethical outlook, but stoical rather than protestant, and a far more versatile writer, was D. Mamin-Sibiryak (1852-1912). Born of a family of clergy in an industrial district of the Urals, he studied at St. Petersburg University and later made friends with Gleb Uspensky and Mikhailovsky. He was not led astray by any populist illusions; for he saw that the peaceful patriarchal order had already been disintegrated by industry and large-scale mechanization, and he was too realistic to delude himself into thinking that this process could be deflected from the direction in which it was being driven by the gathered impetus of past events. He depicted

brilliantly a phase of the industrial revolution in Russia, seen against the background of Siberian manners and customs, whose sturdy vigour and impetuosity much of his writing reflects. He saw this agitated scene deployed before him as a blind play of natural forces, which concealed still deeper internal ties binding together phenomena and personalities. Flashes of insight occasionally reveal the inner structure of these connexions in disconcerting glimpses which shatter complacency. A characteristic image which he used to express this thought was the lush summer grass covered with morning dew, in appearance as calm as the air, but in reality the battle-field of thousands of living beings, struggling in unheard convulsions.

His novels lack formal construction and precision of style, but they compensate by their abundance of vital characters. Perhaps the most satisfying of them, and the richest in human qualities, is *The Privalov Millions*, the story of a pioneering family of Ural factory owners, who build up a great fortune, which gradually crumbles into nothing as a result of mad extravagance, mismanagement, and the tricks of dishonest trustees. The hero, Sergei Privalov, grandson of the founder of the family's wealth, far from resembling the brutal slave-driving capitalist prototype, is a mild thoughtful man with ideals of philanthropy and social service, some of which he has determination enough to put into practice. His ancestors are shown as insatiable children of nature who knew no ordinary luxury and no ordinary extravagance. Their tremendous and monstrous wealth had created a legend in the ironies of the Urals. 'A kind of wild revelry took possession of

hem; they covered miles of road with red cloth而已 in order to enjoy driving over it with their roikas full of drunken company; the horses not only ad champagne to drink, but were bathed in champagne. Innumerable guests stayed in the house as if it were their own home, and were treated to a 'whole harem of serf beauties.' The Privalovs, like other factory owners, supported every kind of runaway serf, and wanderers without passports, because this motley mobile crowd comprised their main labour force. In such a wild, ruthless environment the character of Sergei Privalov's guardian, the 'old believer', Babarev, stands out in its unwavering honest devotion, restraint, and strength of will. That massive head, with the remains of grey hair and a grey matted beard, was beautiful in an original and ancient style. His small, penetrating grey eyes looked searching and stern, but were now full of warm affection. The most astonishing thing in that stern face, with its bushy grey eyebrows and tightly pursed lips, was the smile. It literally illuminated the whole face. Only children in a smile like that, or very serious energetic old men.'

Some of the Asiatic elements in Russia are unveiled in this Siberian novel. Many of the Bashkirs had been turned out of their villages by the spreading Ural factories; a deputation of them came to beg Privalov for redress. 'Privalov was painfully struck by the spectacle of that poverty of the masses, unlike the poverty we are accustomed to see in the Russian towns, villages, and countryside. Civilized beggary asks, if not in words, at least by gestures, movement of the arms, a look, by its

very rags—it asks for something because it still has hope. But here it is quite different; these emaciated bronze faces with slanting dark eyes look at you with a dim hopeless despair, their movements express a deadly apathy, even in the folds of their tattered robes you can feel a purely Asiatic resignation to fate. There is a kind of oppressive grandeur about this thousand-year-old philosophy of the steppes.'

The climax of the story is reached when the old Baharev at last sees his lifelong devotion to the well-being of the Privalov family crowned by the marriage of his daughter to Sergei Privalov and by the birth of their son. The Privalov millions had by that time crumbled away, and the marriage is clearly a disinterested one, firmly based on mutual feelings of respect and love, matured by long friendship and by the previous experience, shared by both partners, of an unsuccessful first marriage. Baharev's ambitions are amply satisfied by the knowledge that the strong Privalov stock, united with his own, is producing descendants to carry it on into a new epoch.

Mamin Sibiryak is also appreciated by Russians for his charming and humorous children's tales—which can be read with equal pleasure by adults. He adored children, and some of his short stories, written about but not for children, are more compact in form and richer in fine perception than any of his longer novels. The beautiful story *Children's Shadows* is equal to the best of Chekhov, though with a sterner quality of imagination.

One of the few mainly humorous novelists of this period was the now almost forgotten Ukrainian, L. N.

Potapenko (1856-1915). In *The Curse of Talent* he paints a gay fascinating picture of a prevalent type of educated and patriotic Russian, full of excellent intentions, contemplating the many things which he might have been and so nearly became. This man, Bobrov, had shown great ability at the university. 'I wanted to learn the history of the human race, so I took up philology and began to swallow book after book. One of the professors had an eye on me, but it appeared that my country was not in need of such a science, so I turned about and began studying Smith, Mill, and Marx. We naturally recognized no authorities except our own. . . . It did not take us long to crush Mill. . . . It suddenly became as clear as daylight that he was good for nothing—because the salvation of our country lay not at all in political economy, but in anatomy and physiology. Well, the country had to be saved at any price, and God forbid that another man but myself should save it. The result of it all was my going over to the department of natural sciences. I was glued to a chair and the microscope glued to my nose. I sat there days and nights analysing, and don't imagine it was without results. Indeed not! I even made a discovery. I brought to light and described some peculiar property of the blood corpuscle; yes, sir! . . . I do not remember what property that was, but it produced an impression, and they even printed my description of it in some periodical. But while I was dissecting the blood corpuscle, a new tendency was ripening within me—the devil take it, another talent! Nature had planted so many within me, and each of them was dying to show itself and would not yield to any other.' So this eternal student

branches off into literature, and thence to composing songs.

A few influential writers of this time were conspicuously untendentious and detached from any of the main intellectual groups, though fundamentally serious artists and true to the main psychological realistic tradition of Russian literature. The most prolific of them was P. Boborykin (1836-1921), whose vivid and intelligent novels provide an absorbing chronicle of the professional and middle class. The turmoil of rough business enterprise, trickery, and feverish speculations which Mamin brought to life in his Siberian novels, is already toned down in the more urbane settled and 'Westernized' bourgeois society dealt with by Boborykin. His novel *Vasilii Tyorkin* is an interesting psychological study of a new type of Russian self-made man. In his energetic efficiency and sense of moderation he is like the factory-manager Solomin in Turgenev's *Virgin Soil*. Though he started as a peasant and worked his way up to the position of a wealthy business man, he is free from the obvious faults of the 'kulak'. Not cynical, but with too much sober common sense to share the intellectuals' dream of a peasant Utopia, he is none the less alive to the needs of the poor people from whom he has sprung, and is not estranged from them by any artificial barrier of self-importance, conceit, or overweening greed.

Owing to a variety of factors Boborykin's literary fame has long been eclipsed; he wrote so much that his work was difficult to sift, and his novels were little translated into other languages; but he was considerably more than a facile journalistic writer of feuilletons. He described objectively a complex

class in which he saw nascent virtues as well as the usual conspicuous vices, but which had only begun to evolve its own style and establish itself in Russia at the time it was swept away in 1917; then his death in 1921 coincided with the consecration of Russian literature to entirely new tasks. Among the best of his many novels is *He Grew Wiser*, the story of a despised idealist who never won respect until he changed into an unscrupulous man of affairs, and *Kitay-Gorod*, an acutely observant study of changing middle-class society in one of the main business quarters of Moscow.

The exuberant N. Garin-Mikhailovsky (1852-1906) combined the ripe experience of a busy constructional engineer with that of an active landlord bent on agricultural improvements. His great vitality overflowed spontaneously into literature, and his writings are exceptionally fresh, vivid, and close to actualities. He is best remembered for his partly autobiographical trilogy, consisting of the three novels *Tyoma's Childhood*, *Schoolboys*, and *Students*, which give an unforgettable picture of family upbringing and education for boys of the wealthier class at that time. The first part introduces the ardent, imaginative, and sensitive child coming into conflict with his disciplinarian father and shielded by his more humane and broad-minded mother. This clash of temperaments continues in a different setting in *Schoolboys*, where he narrowly escapes from being choked by the deadly stereotyped routine of the Russian secondary school. The darker and more sordid aspects of student life are frankly faced and a searching light is thrown on the ruin caused by the excessive reading and intellectual assimilation

demanded from the unstable, less robust type of student. Garin's powers of observation and sympathy, as well as his unconquerable optimism, are also illustrated by a number of stories he wrote, based on his own experiences as an experimental farmer struggling to overcome the impediments imposed by the wretchedness and superstition of Russian village life.

All the most valuable thought and feeling of this period was expressed in prose, and no separate or equivalent sphere of life was developed in poetry, which mainly echoed in a more fragmentary emotional form many of the ideas of the leading prose writers, some of whom themselves wrote poems as a secondary activity. While Pushkin's own wonderful short stories and 'novels in verse' provided a stimulus and example for the later creations of the great Russian novelists, the achievement of his purely poetic genius set a more difficult task for his successors. For Pushkin's verse was so utterly complete, whether in depth of feeling, in range of subject, or in perfection of fresh and disciplined technique—it went so far—that it seemed almost impossible for any poetry to go farther. Is it surprising that most of the poets who followed him appear derivative, vulgar, or slight? His simple sensuous and passionate qualities, his ringing musical rhythms and taut classical restraint, expressed the quintessence of Russian poetry, and became a finished model for future aspirants rather than a stepping-stone to any higher creation.

Only his near contemporary, Lermontov, perfected one type of lyric and romantic ballad, and Nekrasov's keen talent raised the 'civic' poetry of

caustic indignation to a level which it had never previously reached.

The less civic A. Koltsov (1808-42) was a genuine peasant bard with the fresh pantheistic lyricism of Russian folklore, and his poems have a touching and innocent charm very close to the intimate atmosphere of Russian meadows and forests. T. Tyutchev (1803-73), an original and profoundly philosophical poet, was first properly appreciated by the symbolists and by the religious philosopher Vladimir Soloviev, who was also a poet of some significance. Tyutchev advocated detachment and the cult of solitude as a means of merging human personality with the life of nature. He wrote elusively of 'magic thoughts that hide away from the light and glare of day'. For him the worst evil was unbelief, withering the soul, and the greatest joy an incommunicable experience of divinity, 'unbroken, undefiled, unstirred'. In 'Silentium' he thus expressed one of his recurrent and basic ideas:

Heart knows not to speak with heart,
A thought once spoken is a lie.

Count Alexei Tolstoy (1817-75), a prolific and clever poet in numerous genres, is chiefly remembered for his historical ballads and dramas, for which he drew extensively on folk literature. The Parnassian 'aestheticism' of A. Fet (1820-92) is difficult for many of us to appreciate to-day, and his hazy, glowing poems with their soft, delicate music are even more untranslatable into other languages than is most Russian poetry. Fet's lyrical poems contain a strong religious element of a rarefied kind, a sense of ecstasy grasping at the finest shades of emotion.

He was not adequately valued during his lifetime, because the critics were prejudiced against him as a frankly conservative landowner, but Tolstoy warmly admired him, and he was an inspiration to the later 'symbolist' poets. After Fet and Nekrasov the talent of both 'pure' and ethical poets declined more and more into a melancholy and frustrated shadow of the more robust emotions of their greater predecessors. The nadir of poetic art before the symbolist revival was reached in the spineless and sickly verses of S. Nadson (1862-87).

The Russian drama of this period was, like Russian poetry, completely overshadowed by the novel, short story, and discursive prose. The greater novelists—Pisemsky, Tolstoy, and Turgenev—wrote some good plays as a natural extension of their main creative work in the novel form, and the latter's *A Month in the Country* is a masterpiece of subtly evoked 'atmosphere' as perfectly constructed as any of his narrative prose. Though Dostoevsky never wrote for the stage, several of his novels were later successfully adapted for it, a comparatively straightforward task, since his extensive dialogue could be lifted bodily into a play with little essential addition or alteration. There was no special conception of the drama as a separate branch of literary art, with its own rules and technique. Consequently the Western idea of 'plot', as a planned development of action and external incident leading up to a climax, does not figure much more prominently in the average Russian play than it does in the novel. Action in both was subordinate to the delineation of character and emotional moods.

One of the few gifted writers of this period who

specialized in plays was A. N. Ostrovsky (1823-86). He deals principally with the Moscow merchant class, among whom he was born and bred, and the nobility, officials, and peasants are scantily represented in his plays. Ostrovsky's vulgar, resourceful, strong-willed types thus differ from the more refined characters drawn in the novels of the landed gentry. They give great scope for dramatic stage effects and provide wonderful opportunities for the display of individual histrionic talent. Indeed, Ostrovsky's plays are not intended to be read without being seen, and since it is almost impossible for foreigners to act them convincingly, only the robust vitality of the Russian tradition of 'character' acting have preserved their literary reputation. Ostrovsky wrote so many plays of high dramatic quality that it is difficult to single out a few of them as superior to others. The one most generally praised by foreigners is his tragedy *The Storm*, a sternly poetic rendering of a merchant family's life in a provincial town on the Volga. It contains in Madame Kabanov the most triumphantly despotic of Ostrovsky's favourite type of matriarchal domestic tyrant; she sets the prevailing tone of crass superstition and ruthlessness, under the weight of which her daughter-in-law Katerina is crushed. But this kind of play is so dated in many of its sentiments, and demands so much imaginative sympathy from the audience, that unless it is magnificently acted it tends to fall flat.

More characteristic of Ostrovsky are his extremely realistic comedies with their biting humour and worldly wisdom, such as *Poverty is no Crime*, *The Passionate Heart*, and *Incompatibility of Temperament*. In the latter play, the merchant class, with

all its limitations and coarse vices, is compared favourably with the impoverished gentry who run after rich brides. The young man Paul complains to his mother that after squandering the family fortune she has brought him up in such a way that he is only fit to spend money which he has not got. 'I cannot live in the same fashion as these copying clerks I have to sit side by side with. They buy onion-pies at the costermongers and stand eating them at the street door. They can do that sort of thing, they are made that way—but I can't. And now I have to go through an examination, in some district institution. It's dreadful. You see, if I had a fortune, I should never even hear of all these things, law-courts, district institutions, and copying clerks with their onion-pies.' As Paul cannot work, he resigns himself to marrying a wealthy merchant's daughter, and on the earliest possible occasion asks her for money, ostensibly to invest at a higher rate of interest, but in fact to pay his debts. The young lady firmly refuses. 'In our merchant class,' she exclaims indignantly and with commendable frankness, 'it is not the custom to give away one's money. Of what significance shall I be if I have no money?' Ostrovsky's delightful *Snowmaiden* ('Snegurochka') is drawn from Russian folklore, and since it was turned into an opera with Rimsky-Korsakov's music it has become a popular classic, though, like most Russian opera, it has hardly been properly appreciated in western Europe.

The Russian theatre was dominated by Ostrovsky and his followers till the advent of Chekhov, and the foundation of the Moscow Art Theatre by Stanislavsky at the end of the century introduced a multitude

of richer dramatic conceptions, a much more varied and cosmopolitan repertoire of plays, and a thorough-going theory and practice of stage production which made the Russian theatre world-famous.

situation it is hardly surprising that the more thoughtful and cultured individuals felt utterly thwarted. The changes which they saw could not be interpreted as improvements, but looked like an unleashed progressive destruction at work, giving more ground for despair than for any form of spiritual nourishment or long-term social advance.

The greatest and most representative figure in this twilight period of Russian literature was Anton Chekhov (1860-1904). Paralysis of the will, nervous irritability over trifles, and an obsession of incurable loneliness, are the main characteristics of Chekhov's 'heroes', who are overwhelmed by bourgeois meanness and the endless petty pinpricks of everyday routine. Only his most vulgar and blatant people are represented as successful in life. Moral courage, nobility of mind, and culture are all swept away by degrees in an unequal fight with stupidity, squalor, and the coarsest egotism. A short-lived triumph of crude self-assertion goes to men like the new-rich peasant Lopakhin, who buys the *Cherry Orchard* in order to cut it down, or to the incredibly self-satisfied and empty professor in *Uncle Vanya*. The more intelligent and sensitive people succumb because they are a weak minority dragged down into the treacherous morass of endless trifles, disputes, and demoralizing gossip. To begin with, they gesticulate and struggle, but by degrees a numb indifference undermines them and they submit to the elemental processes of decay. Chekhov finds the most appropriate scene for these tragi-comedies in the monotonous country backwaters of Russia, with their dim grey dreariness. His own vital personality and consummate art both conflict with and reflect this milieu of spiritual

and material poverty and ineffectiveness. He literally raises finished masterpieces out of a formless flux; of course, these never achieve the monumental architecture of Tolstoy but they remain wonderful mosaics of incident and impression. 'In all my thoughts, feelings, and ideas, which I form about anything,' he wrote, 'there is wanting that something universal which could bind these together in one whole. Each feeling and each thought lives detached in me, and in all my opinions, and in all the pictures which my imagination paints, not even the most cunning analyst will discover what is called the general idea or the God of the living man.'

Many major writers have constructed in their work some underlying framework of implicit ideals. Chekhov did just the reverse. He created a picture of chaotic indifferent nature, manifesting its indifference by throwing up helpless broken people, who through no apparent fault of their own do not know how to live. Owing to Chekhov's tender artistic sympathy this picture dominates his scene, though it conflicts with his more positive types, the few surviving representatives of great human ideals and the pushing materialists, guided solely by their strong instincts and greed. Thus the overstrained Ivanov in his first major play, a worn-out superfluous person, who has lost any valid claim to live at all, in fact takes the central place in the dramatic sequence and even defeats in argument his morally superior opponents. 'I have the right to give you advice,' he announces in the first act to the good citizen, Dr. Lvov. 'Don't you marry a Jewess, or an abnormal person, or a blue-stocking. Choose something ordinary, without any bright colours or superfluous

shades. Make it a principle to build your life out of clichés. My dear man, don't fight thousands single-handed, don't tilt at windmills, don't run your head against the wall. God save you from all kinds of Back-to-the-Landers, advanced doctrines, passionate speeches . . . shut yourself right inside your own shell, and do the tiny work set you by God. . . . It is cosier, honester, and healthier.' Should this outburst be interpreted as an adulation of calm routine existence at the expense of strenuous endeavour? It is almost a denial of both. Tolstoy had called on men to fight their own instincts instead of each other, appealing to their conscience and sense of shame, and he had tried to awaken in them faith in themselves and their strength of will; but Chekhov found this faith prematurely shattered by events, and in its place a resigned sense of fatigue and helpless loneliness against which even the desire to fight had not survived.

Chekhov was born in Taganrog of a peasant family; his grandfather was a serf on one of the large estates in that region and had bought his freedom. Those who claim that it requires about a century of education to produce great literature among primitive uncultured people should remember that it fell to this doctor of peasant origin to portray the last phase of the old Russian society with an artistic refinement and skill comparable to that of Turgenev. He studied at Moscow and took his degree as a doctor of medicine. His early stories were humorous or grotesque, and written chiefly for comic papers; the first collection of them in book form was published in 1886. Many of them are slight but subtle caricatures of mediocre or ridiculous people, like *The Album* or

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The Horse Family Name. It was for such stories that he first became famous in Russia, where he was essentially a popular rather than a 'highbrow' writer, though not abroad, where his literary reputation is founded on his later serious stories and most of all on his plays.

The Work of Art is a perfect miniature specimen of genial satire on provincial prudery and meanness. It has an eminently Chekhovian opening; detached, vivid, and compressed, at once pathetic and comic: 'Holding under his arm an object wrapped in the two hundred and twenty-third number of the *Stock Exchange News*, Sasha Smirnov, his mother's only son, pulled a wry face as he entered the consulting-room of Dr. Koshelkov. "Ah, my dear boy," said the doctor, greeting him, "how do we feel to-day?"'

Sasha explains that he does not know how to thank the doctor for saving his life. He and his mother are such poor people, so unfortunately they cannot pay him in money; instead, as a sign of their deep gratitude, he has brought the doctor an ancient bronze as a present.

'Sasha undid the object and triumphantly placed it on the table. It was a medium-sized antique bronze candelabra of artistic workmanship. It represented a human group. Two female figures stood on the pedestal in the costume of Eve and in positions for the description of which I have insufficient daring and too modest a temperament. The figures smiled alluringly and looked as if (were they not obliged to hold up the candelabra) they would have jumped down from their pedestal and run riot in such a debauch that even to think about

it would be indecent. Glancing at the gift, the doctor slowly scratched his head, cleared his throat and indecisively blew his nose. "Yes, it is certainly a beautiful thing," he muttered, "but, how can I express it . . . extremely unliterary . . . that is not just a *décolleté*, but the devil knows what . . . ?"

"How strangely you look at art, doctor," said Sasha, offended. "That is an artistic object, just consider it. How much beauty and grace it has, that it fills the soul with awe and brings tears to the eyes ! When you see such beauty, you forget everything earthly . . . only look, how much movement, what a mass of expression."

"I understand all that very well, my dear boy," interrupted the doctor, "but then I am a family man; little children run about here and ladies come into the room."

The doctor felt obliged to accept the gift, and after some cogitation, remembered his friend, the lawyer Ukov, to whom he owed money.

"Excellent," decided the doctor, "it would be awkward for him to take money from me as a friend, but it will look very appropriate if I present him with the object. I will carry this devilry over to him. Luckily he is a bachelor, and frivolous enough."

The lawyer went into ecstacies over the bronze, but soon, thinking of his clients, he decided to pass it on as a gift to an actor. Eventually it finds its way back into the hands of Sasha's mother, an antique dealer, who was, of course, the original purchaser. The closing scene brings Sasha once more to the doctor with a paper package under his arm. "Doctor," he exclaimed breathlessly, "imagine my joy! By good luck we were able to get a pair for

your candelabra . . . Mamma is so happy—I am her only son, and you saved my life." Quivering with gratitude, Sasha laid the bronze on the table. The doctor opened his mouth, wanted to say something but said nothing; he could not find his tongue.'

Chekhov's humour is not always infused with irony; it can be gentle and tender; as in the story *Dushechka*, a charming picture of the noble self-forgetfulness, running to almost absurd extremes, so frequently met with in Russian heroines. Having first married a theatre manager, this warm-hearted girl identifies herself completely with his interests, and proclaims to everyone that the theatre is the most wonderful thing, the very spice of life. After her husband dies she marries a timber merchant, and then talks and dreams only about buying and selling timber. When her second husband also dies, she consoles herself with a veterinary doctor, and starts to argue that everyone's health and well-being depend on the medical attention given to animals. But this man leaves her, and for a while she is left without any source of ideas. Finally she adopts a small boy, to whom she devotes herself with renewed fervour, and starts to repeat with naïve conviction everything he says about what happens in his school.

Chekhov excelled in fragments, and never wrote a solid novel; even in his stories the beginning is generally the most brilliant part, and they often become muddled and uncertain towards the end. After 1886 he stopped writing for the comic papers, and his stories acquired that mellow, serious tone, which also permeates his plays. *A Dreary Story* (1889) marks the beginning of Chekhov's maturest period; it illustrates with perfect art—so that its

very dreariness becomes fascinating—one of his most reiterated themes, the mutual isolation of individuals and their incapacity to understand or help each other even through disinterested love. Chekhov wrote so many minor masterpieces that it would be invidious in this context to do more than name a few as examples of his style in different veins. His *Ward No. 6* is an even more gruesome lunatic asylum story than Garshin's *Red Flower*. It tells of a doctor, a gentle conscientious man, who tries ineffectively to put an end to the disgusting malpractices which take place in the hospital of which he is in charge. The only man in the whole neighbourhood with whom he feels he can exchange ideas is a lunatic in Ward No. 6, and with him he spends long hours absorbed in conversation. His brutal subordinate seizes the opportunity of claiming that the doctor is himself a lunatic, and the latter with a dreadful passivity allows himself to be shut up; only at the last moment something rouses him to revolt against his fate, but it is already too late, and he dies in an apoplectic fit. Thus baldly summarized, the story may sound grotesque, almost ridiculous, particularly to English readers, but it is constructed with that artistic flair in the selection of emotionally significant detail and a developing sense of inevitability, which are distinctive of Chekhov's best work.

His most substantial and original creations are, of course, his famous plays—*Ivanov* (1886), *The Seagull* (1896), *Uncle Vanya* (1900), *The Three Sisters* (1901), and *The Cherry Orchard* (1904). Their triumphant success owed a lot to their superbly finished production by the Moscow Art Theatre. (*The Seagull* had been hissed down by the audience when it

was first produced in the Petersburg State Theatre in 1896.) Stanislavsky, with his all-star troupe trained to the finger-tips, submerging individual stardom in perfectly adjusted team-work, knew how to make the utmost of Chekhov's power to create intense dramatic atmosphere and interest without recourse to any conventional dramatic effects (excepting suicides in the fourth act). In the symbolic images of these plays we see his weary enervated Russia, in which precisely the talented people have lost courage and enthusiasm, where ability withers away in melancholy resignation or commits suicide as a last desperate protest. Yet it is the diagnosis of an honest doctor, distinguishing Utopian dreams from the clearer symptoms he observed. 'I lost my faith long ago,' Chekhov wrote, 'and now only watch with bewilderment the religious-minded intellectuals. . . . Religion stands apart from all modern culture. Modern culture is the beginning of the work to be performed in the name of a great future, while the religious movement is a survival, almost the end, of that which is dead or dying. . . . I am neither liberal nor conservative, nor gradualist, nor ascetic, nor indifferentist. I should like to be an independent artist—and that is all. . . . Any trade mark or label to me means a prejudice.'

Ivanov, in the play of that name, is a man who shouldered a load which broke his back. Why should he carry about incessantly his cold weariness and horror of life, convinced that his malady is incurable, and a source of infection to others? He sensibly puts an end to his life. So does Treplev, the young author in *The Seagull*, but only when he is convinced that his literary talent has dried up, for his faith in

himself had sustained him till then. Uncle Vanya has outbursts of revolt against his fate, but, lacking the courage to kill himself, buries his impotent grief in a dreary drudgery for the benefit of his useless brother-in-law, Professor Serebriakov. He had for years joyfully slaved for this brother-in-law when he idolized him as a superior being, but he continued to slave for him long after he had recognized the nauseating futility of the professor's pretensions. 'The man has been writing about art for twenty-five years and doesn't know the first thing about it. For twenty-five years he has been chewing on other men's thoughts about realism, naturalism, and all such rubbish—for twenty-five years he has been reading and writing things that clever men have long known and in which stupid ones are simply not interested.'

Astrov, the doctor in *Uncle Vanya*, is a finer type of man, whose bestiality only emerges in his attitude to women. Luckily his absorption in his medical work and forestry helps him to forget the unedifying society which surrounds him. 'The peasants are all alike,' he says, 'they are stupid and live in dirt. The educated people are hard to get on with; one gets tired of them. All our friends are petty and shallow and see no further than their noses. Those that have brains are hysterical and devoured by a passion for self-analysis.' He is one of those characters who is curiously consoled by the thought that if mankind is happier a thousand years from now he will have been a little bit responsible for their happiness. For the present he faces the uninspiring facts of human destructiveness. 'The forests are disappearing, the rivers are running

dry, the game is exterminated, the climate is spoiled and the earth becomes poorer and uglier every day. It is the consequence of the ignorance and unconsciousness of starving, shivering, sick humanity, which to save its children instinctively clutches at everything that can warm it and still its hunger . . . you may perhaps object that this is the march of progress . . . and you might be right if roads had been run through these ruined woods or if factories and schools had taken their place. The people then would have become better educated, healthier and richer; but as it is, we have nothing of the sort, we have the same swamps and mosquitoes, the same disease and want, typhoid, diphtheria, and burning villages.'

The Three Sisters tells a similar story of thwarted endeavour; stifled by the pettiness and stagnation of the little town in which they live, they all yearn for something better without knowing what—and are, of course, unable to satisfy their yearning. These intelligent, sensitive, and ardent women feel that they are wasting away. 'In this town', says one of them, 'it is a luxury to speak three languages. It is not even a luxury, but a deformity, like having a sixth finger to one's hand.' They imagine that if they could start a new and broader life in Moscow they could find satisfaction. But they remain where they are, caught in the meshes of a multitude of small obligations from which they can no longer extricate themselves. The officers of the regiment temporarily garrisoned in the little town give the three sisters tantalizing glimpses of the greater world beyond. One of them, Baron Tusenbach, falls in love with the youngest sister Irene. He reflects

on the vanity of speculation and vague desires. 'Migrant birds fly and fly, and whatever thoughts, high or low, enter their heads, they will still fly, without knowing why or where they fly, and will continue to fly, whatever philosophers come to live among them.' Irene accepts his persistent offer of marriage, but acknowledges that she cannot love him. ('My soul is like an expensive piano which is locked and the key lost.') At least she will start something new, she will get away from that town where the inhabitants, almost before they have begun to live, 'become dull, grey, uninteresting, lazy, apathetic, useless, unhappy' and in order not to go silly from boredom, try to make life many-sided by gossip, vodka, cards, and lawsuits. But Tusenbach is killed in a duel. The regiment leaves the town, and the three sisters are left alone. This scene achieves a haunting pathos through the most telling strokes of Chekhov's peculiar dramatic mastery. The three sisters sit together and listen to the fading music of the military band, which accompanies the regiment as it marches out of the town. 'Oh, how the music plays! They are leaving us . . . we remain alone. . . . But now we must live, we must work, just work. . . . The music is so gay, so joyful, it seems that in a little while we shall know why we are living, why we are suffering. . . . If we could only know, if we could only know.' It is the same cry as in *Uncle Vanya*, failure to live and inability to know why, but the ill-starred sisters are fortified by the thought that their broken lives will in some incomprehensible way be of service to other beings in a distant happier future.

Chekhov's plays are so replete with delicate artistic touches, that unless they are acted with unerring

discernment and precision, many of their situations fall flat and appear absurd or simply boring, eliciting laughter and yawns from the audience. Such farcical versions of his plays are sometimes inevitable in countries outside Russia; apart from missing the spirit of the original, the productions are often excellent and exceedingly comic, but it is a refreshing revelation to see Chekhov performed by the Moscow Art Theatre, where he is part of the flesh and blood of their great theatrical tradition. Chekhov had little influence on the future course of Russian literature, largely because he was inimitable—his would-be disciples fall into utter bathos—and had drained to the dregs all the creative possibilities of the task he had undertaken. In Soviet Russia he is appreciated as an artist but revered as the faithful chronicler of a period which culminated in the defeat and liquidation of the Russian middle class.

Alexander Kuprin (1870–1938), started his career as a cavalry officer and first made his name by stories and novels of army life—*The Duel* (1905). Like Gorky, he loved action, vigorous movement, and adventure, but some of his best stories have the gentler glow of Chekhov's wistfulness, as in *The Bracelet of Garnets*, which describes the hopeless love of a poor clerk for an aristocratic married lady. In *The Duel* his picture of debauched officers, bullying their terrified and ignorant subordinates, lays bare the vilest side of army life; the narrative is well constructed. Prophecies of the shape of future betterment are put into the mouth of Kuprin's philosophical drunkard, Nasanki, who says: 'When I was a schoolboy, the old cows and jackdaws croaked

in our ears. "Love your neighbour as yourself in gentleness, obedience, and the fear of God." Then came certain strong, honest, fanatical men who said, "Come and join us and we will throw ourselves into the abyss, so that the future race shall live in light and freedom." But I never understood a word of all this. Who is going to show me in a convincing way, in what manner I am linked with this neighbour of mine—damn him—who may be a miserable slave, a leper, or an idiot? Can any reasonable being tell me why I should crush my head so that the generation in the year 3200 may attain a higher standard of happiness? Love of humanity is burnt out and has vanished from the heart of man. In its stead shall come a new view of life and this consists in the individual's love for himself, for his own powerful intelligence and the infinite riches of his feelings and perceptions.' Though the passage just quoted throws an interesting sidelight on the development of social ideas through literary characters, it must not be taken as typical of Kuprin's work, which covers a variety of genres, and is surprisingly free from any obsession with abstract ideas.

Ivan Bunin (b. 1870), is a more poetical prose writer than Kuprin, with a beautifully polished style and varied originality. He carried on the classical tradition of Turgenev and Chekhov, and shared their preoccupation with themes outside the great cities. His novel, *The Village* (1910), did for the commercialized *mujik* what Saltykov-Shchedrin's *The Golovlyov Family* had done for the squirearchy. It conjures up with an overpowering sense of Russian gloom the bestial and poverty-stricken setting of

village life. Gorky praised him for having boldly spoken the truth about the Russian peasant, without any attempt to gloss over his failings. Bunin is also a master of the short story form, and one of the few major Russian writers, who, having emigrated after the Revolution, managed to continue creative work on the level of his previous quality, in spite of living in permanent exile.

The wildest extremes of pessimistic negation were reached in the stories and plays of Leonid Andreyev (1871-1919). Intellectually denying the force of human reason and love, he had none of the compensating mystical optimism of Chekhov or of the major symbolists, Sologub, Byely, and Bryusov. His artistic creation, working on themes of morbid psychology, obsessed with death and sex, drew from the worst in Tolstoy and from the most destructive side of Nietzsche's philosophy, which during the 'nineties spread insidiously through intellectual and student circles in Russia, where it took root in fertile soil.

Both Nietzsche and Marx had a marked influence on Russian literature at the end of the nineteenth century, and—what is often forgotten—they worked for some distance in the same direction. Both were abnormal products of the old abstract German philosophy—both had found the mainspring of ethics in dynamic force and hatred—and believed that society must be renewed on a class basis, recognizing the rights of violence to do so. At that point their ways parted; for Marx the proletariat, or rather their indoctrinated vanguard, were the historically appointed bearers of the new power ethics, whereas Nietzsche revived the aristocratic type in the myth

of a radiant band of 'supermen', who worshipped strength and despised all weakness.¹ Both were serenely untroubled by the need to distinguish between good and evil in any absolute sense. The most alarmingly anti-rational of Nietzsche's ideas was that reason itself, once it prevailed over instinct and mythological aspirations, would accelerate the disintegration and decline of human society.

Andreyev's chief theme, like Chekhov's, was the spiritual loneliness of the educated individual, his painful separation from others. But with the acceptance of Nietzschean morality, the frustrated intellectual easily imagines himself a superman. Andreyev saw that the power of acting freely and instinctively had already been atrophied in many Russian intellectuals; however fiery their abstract thought might be, it ran like an engine disconnected from the machine which it was supposed to drive. In this impasse his intellectual characters are frequently driven to suicide or insanity. Much of his work has a somewhat forced 'grand guignol' flavour, but his best stories retain their interest as unique psychological studies. Such are *The Lie*, *The Thought*, *The Gulf*, and *In the Fog*. These stories, especially the last two, aroused violent public controversy when they were published, and Andreyev was accused of contaminating Russian youth by his perverse morbidity and deliberate choice of loathsome subjects. His popularity with his reading public was none the less firmly established. Some

¹ It is sometimes forgotten that Nietzsche advocated an international aristocracy, that he had a low opinion of Germans, and did not worship the state.

of his rarer characters, like the hero of *The Obscure Future*, decide to face life in all its complexity, but even they suffer from a sickly instability, and are moved more by fits of excitement and nervous exaltation than by a healthy spirit of sober determination.

His melodramatic story, *The Red Laugh* is a sequel to Tolstoy's Sevastopol stories and Garshin's *Four Days*, exposing the sordid misery of modern war, shorn of its last vestiges of romantic and patriotic glitter. Though Andreyev, with his flair for illustration, inserts many shocking physical details in this grim story, he is principally concerned with the devastating effect of war on the human mind. He sees death and physical mutilation as in themselves far lesser evils than all the abnormal emotional states and mental diseases which are bred by modern warfare. One of his few direct attempts at 'civic' writing is *The Seven Who Were Hanged*, which pays a sincere tribute to the stoical courage of Russian revolutionaries, in addition to being a strong indictment of capital punishment. Andreyev's plays are much less successful than his stories in blending creative imagination with real life; the majority of them summarize his favourite themes by stilted metaphysical dialogues pronounced in a cold and dismal symbolic setting. Such are *The Life of Man* and *Anathema*. It is, of course, a mistake to interpret Andreyev's artistic work in too literal a manner or to draw logical conclusions from his apocalyptic despair. He himself wrote in one of his essays (*Impressions of the Theatre*): 'In denying everything, one arrives immediately at symbols. In refuting life, one is but an involuntary apologist. I never believe so

much in life as when I read the father of pessimism, Schopenhauer.'

M. Artsybashev (1878-1927), sprang to fame in the first decade of this century on account of his notorious novel *Sanin*, which described sexual licence with a shameless freedom new to Russian literature. Its literary merits are mediocre and its immorality seems naïve enough to-day (Gorky described its hero as 'a lascivious two-legged goat in trousers'), but it is historically significant. The defeat of the 1905 revolution had caused a new wave of frustration to sweep over the intelligentsia, who sought escape in a feverish craving for easy enjoyment and an all-round relaxation of the remaining moral inhibitions. Artsybashev, like Andreyev, took the most negative side of Tolstoy—his contempt for the standard cult of social conventions—combined this with Nietzsche's glorification of powerful unfettered instincts—and preached the supremacy and justice of naked sexual desire as the main incentive of human life. In Russia, where the didactic attitude to literature was so deeply engrained both in critics and readers, the ideas of *Sanin* were taken up as seriously as they were offered, and at such a moment gave a fillip to licentious behaviour.

Sergei Sergeyev-Tsensky (b. 1876), in his first creative period resembled Andreyev, absorbed like him in the rendering of pathological mental crises induced in solitary people tormented by the silent indifference of nature. But his style is much more exuberant, and he has an exceptional sense of the precise value of words, ingeniously adapting his idiom to the personality of his different characters. One of his most original stories, *Movements* (1910),

analyses the gradual ruin of a bustling self-made business-man who is morally disintegrated and financially ruined by a succession of strange strokes of fate. *Babayev* is a more externally exciting but rather less convincing story of a young officer who is afflicted by sadistic desires, and finds gratification for them in helping to suppress the rebels of 1905, before meeting his own death at their hands. The *Oblique Helena*, the story of an engineer in the Donetz region, who, after deciding to commit suicide, changes his mind, is one of his last writings before the October Revolution, and shows a mental striving towards a more cheerful acceptance of life.

Meanwhile symbolism, the international movement of the 'nineties, was assuming a distinct shape of its own in Russia. The versatile D. Merezkovsky (b. 1865), a kind of Russian Matthew Arnold, poet, novelist, critic, and philosopher, was the high-priest of the Russian version of this intellectual movement, and his pamphlet 'On the Cause of the Decline and on the New Trends in Russian Literature' (1892), its chief critical manifesto. He thought that Russian literature had reached the same stage as had the intellectual reaction in France against the extremes of naturalism in Zola's novels, provoking the cult of Verlaine and Mallarmé. On his return from Paris, Merezkovsky announced that he was disappointed in the Russian stagnation of spirit and lack of interest in lofty ideas. But he sensed that groping efforts were being made by the national genius to find new modes of creation, and he expressed his determination to promote them. He described the new literary trend as one 'which reflects the vague longing of an entire

generation, arising from the depths of the modern European and Russian spirit . . . we are witnessing the great and significant struggle between two views of life, two diametrically opposite conceptions of the world. In its ultimate demands, religious feeling clashes with the latest deductions of experimental science, and modern art is characterized by these principal elements; mystical content, symbols, and the development of artistic sensibility—which the French writers have rather cleverly called Impressionism. The avidity for that which has never before been experienced, the pursuit of elusive shades, of the obscure and unconscious in our sensibility, is a characteristic feature of the ideal poetry of the future.'

The sources of the Russian aesthetic revival of the 'nineties were far from exclusively French. Of other foreign influences the strongest was that of Nietzsche, whose doctrines were partially embodied in the symbolists' attitude to art as a high calling which demanded a special aristocratic quality of ruthless daring and exceptionally strenuous effort. Among Russian writers, Dostoevsky was most favoured, both as a Christian mystic and as an individualist, and he was closely followed by the religious philosopher Vladimir Soloviev. Moreover, the symbolists re-interpreted past Russian writers in a fresh and vivid light, freeing them from a number of outworn clichés of standardized criticism. They set out both to revive a genuine contact with Russian cultural traditions and to encourage a new specifically modern Russian art and literature linked with, but not imitating, the culture of western Europe. *Mir Iskustva* (The World of Art), a periodical founded in

1898 by Sergei Diaghilev, became a focal point of this movement, stimulating the visual arts and the ballet as well as literature. Diaghilev's civilizing work in its Westernizing aspect was helped by the gifted painter and essayist Alexander Benois, an authority on Florentine art, who also rediscovered and elucidated the magnificent architectural beauties of classical Petersburg.

The symbolists were intensely solemn and serious, regarding themselves as priests observing the ritual of a new religion; art was to them a form of divine revelation, and hence the supreme value in life. But Merezhkovsky's partiality for high-sounding phrases and rhetorical antitheses encouraged the use of an artificial jargon which made it easy for ill-wishers to caricature them. As poets they paid much attention to music and rhythm, and even more to the emotional value of sounds, often at the expense of the logical meaning and structure of words and phrases. This sacrifice of sense to sound, and the use of words in peculiar subjective senses, was the main reason why symbolist poetry remained a closed book to the general public.

Constantin Balmont (*b.* 1867) was the easiest of these poets; he excelled in a tuneful and rhythmic rendering of fleeting sensations; Vyacheslav Ivanov (*b.* 1866) and V. Bryusov (1873–1924), were the most erudite and ornate; they were aesthetic rather than philosophical poets and had a certain emotional integrity. Though Bryusov was temperamentally unpolitical, he had a dramatic feeling for majestic historical changes and soon after the October revolution he joined the Communist party. 'Beautiful in the splendour of his power is the Oriental King

Of all the leading intellectuals of the symbolist period, Bryusov's attitude to the revolution was the most realistic. He thus reproached his fellow-intellectuals who were turning against the upheaval which they had rapturously welcomed before its grim facts overwhelmed them with horror;

You were in love with doom and drama!
And dreamed of the deluge coming back—
That which you glimpsed in dread from afar
Has leapt to life in smoke and thunder,
Why then do your false eyes gleam with fear,
Like a startled fawn in timorous wonder.

The most original novelist of this period was F. Sologub (1863-1928), the son of a shoemaker, whose sinister masterpiece, *The Mean Devil*, first appeared in book form in 1907. A relentless struggle between calm unearthly beauty, endless human cruelty and a thoroughly perverse sensuality, runs through his work. The scene of *The Mean Devil* is a Russian provincial town in which is unfolded the story of Peredonov, the local schoolmaster, a fantastic incarnation of joyless hatred, jealously resentful and determined to crush the smallest signs of happiness in others. Sologub's longest novel, *The Created Legend*, is a very unusual one, in three parts. The

action of the first part takes place in Russia in the stormy setting of 1905. The hero, Trirodov, is a complex kind of revolutionary who yearns for serenity. The second and third parts of the novel are placed in the imaginary Kingdom of the United Islands, overshadowed by a volcano which finally erupts. The whole work with its exuberant confusion has a dynamic movement and grips the reader's attention as much by its peculiar intricate psychology as by its eventful narrative—though one cannot help feeling a strained self-consciousness in the symbolic structure of the story. Sologub's prose style is lucid harmonious and vivid, without the far-fetched elaboration or mannerisms of his contemporary Byely.¹ He also wrote good poetry (much of it classically precise and disciplined), inferior plays, and many excellent short stories (such as *In the Crowd*, a nightmare of intense descriptive power, and *The Miracle of the Boy Linus*).

Andrei Byely (1880–1934), whose real name was Boris Bugaev, carried the symbolist manner to a labyrinthine complexity by bringing all his images into a sort of mathematical correspondence with realism, and clothing them with concrete detail. In spite of all this lifelike colour, Byely's impishly playful fancy and ingenious mysticism permeate his work with a sense of evasive fantastic unreality. His father was an eminent professor of mathematics at Moscow University, and Byely already displayed

¹ As an original and erudite Russian prose stylist with a special flair for colloquial phraseology from folklore, A. M. Remizov (b. 1877) had for a time an even stronger influence than Byely on the 'craftsmanship' of the more elaborate ornamental prose written in the early twentieth century and during the initial phases of the Soviet régime.

as a student a keen interest in complicated mathematical problems as well as in contemporary Russian poetry. He then entered the circle of Vladimir Soloviev, and later became an active disciple of the German mystic Rudolph Steiner, in whose anthroposophical establishment, the 'Goetheaneum', near Basel, he lived for four years.

His writings reflect his immersion in religious metaphysics (parts of them are quite meaningless to the uninitiated) but this does not seriously impair their literary or historical interest. His chief novels are *The Silver Dove* (1909), *Petersburg* (1913), and *Kotik Letaev* (1917). The first two are unique variations on a late phase of the Slavophil-Westernizer conflict, and the third is a portentously clever and abstruse interpretation of infant psychology—of the kind which later became so fashionable in the Freud-ridden circles of western Europe.

Daryalsky, the hero of *The Silver Dove*, after plunging into western European culture, continues to search for some sustenance more satisfying than the dry intellectual principles he had found there. He turns towards the East and joins a peasant sect in a remote district of Central Russia. These are 'The Doves', among whom he finds moments of happiness and self-forgetfulness, absorbed in the warm embrace of their mystic ritual. Nevertheless, he feels impelled to leave these simple earthy people in order to recover his intellectual freedom, but in trying to escape from them he is murdered by members of the sect who feared he would betray their secrets to outsiders. *Petersburg* is an even stranger story centred in the nature of the destructive

forces latent in Russian society. The two Ableul hovs, the civil servant father and his Nihilist son are of Tartar origin. The inhuman rigidity of Peterburg officialdom and the cold rationalism of the revolutionaries are incorporated in these closely related figures, in whom the grafting of the West onto wild Mongol stock has unpredictable disruptive consequences. But the real conflict is seen to lie in the divided state of mind engendered in Russia where primitive Mongol force harnessed to an arrogant form of Western rationalism, finds itself face to face with the more personal, self-sacrificing ideals of the traditional Russian religion.

Apart from his novels, Byely wrote several volumes of verse and many critical essays in which he proved himself to be the most penetrating and intellectually advanced exponent of Russian symbolism, striving continually to make his ideas keep pace with the course of historical events. Disappointed in the failure of the 1905 revolution, pacifist during the European war, he at first welcomed the October revolution of 1917 as a purifying conflagration which would burn away only the outworn survivals of the past. He resembled Alexander Blok in finding for a time spiritual affinities between Bolshevism and Christianity, and the fact that they could, however fleetingly, reconcile such contradictory values, is the best testimony to the sincere and entirely unorthodox character of their mystic beliefs. Byely's *Recollections of Alexander Blok* (1922), is one of his most readable and informative works. Like Blok, he fell also temporarily under the spell of the obscure 'Scythian' doctrines of the socialist revolutionary, Ivanov

Razumnik, who preached a historic mission for the new Russia, in which her inherent Asiatic qualities would revive and set her irreconcilably against the more and more alien West. But like other literary intellectuals, who vaguely expected a new phoenix to rise at once from the ashes, Byely was disillusioned by the hideous years of chaos and starvation which followed the October revolution, though he differed from Blok and many others, by not giving way to despair. He switched his ardent faith instead into the channel of a great cultural renascence, which he believed was growing up in Russia alongside but quite apart from the material upheaval of the revolution; for he hoped as did many of the persecuted orthodox believers and sectarians, that a new flowering of spiritual life in Russia was destined to take the place of the old European civilization; he wrote, lectured, and taught with restless activity during the worst period of the civil war, and though he left Russia for Berlin in 1922, he voluntarily returned to his own country in the following year, and remained there till his death.

The most famous of the symbolist poets was Alexander Blok (1880-1921). His fastidious and contemplative nature fitted him least of all to be a revolutionary or to adapt himself to the sharp partisan strife of the age in which he lived. His early poems, such as 'Verses about the Beautiful Lady', were nebulous visionary lyrics of mystical love in which—at least to the unsophisticated—the verbal melody is far more striking than the sense. But by 1908 he had reached the highly creditable conclusion that his verse was unintelligible, and he strove for an outlet to lead him back to a more

complete and earthly human experience. Indeed he revolted against the whole symbolist movement while realizing that he could not altogether rid himself of its moods and attitudes. His later poetic works became more concrete and full-blooded sometimes bitterly ironical, like the 'The Puppet Shows' and 'The Stranger', sometimes ecstatic like 'The Snow Mask'. In 1912 he wrote in a letter to Byely: 'When people live too long in seclusion, as for instance the decadents of the 'nineties, who concerned themselves only with subjects incomprehensible to the masses, and then later on resume their life in the world, they are lost, become helpless, and many of them frequently sink below the level of the masses. It has happened thus to most of us.... I write as one newly born. The more accustomed one is to niceties, the more disconnected become one's meditations on life . . . until a real connecting link is found between the transient and the everlasting, not only can one not become an intelligible writer, but one can be of no use whatsoever.'

During the European war Blok was content to be a pacifist, and was consistent with his previous development when he welcomed the revolution with open arms. It appealed to his ecstatic temperament like a tremendous storm, but he had little sober appreciation of what it signified. In his celebrated poem, 'The Twelve', about twelve Red Army men patrolling the streets of Leningrad, Blok exultantly pays homage to the sheer driving force of the revolution. The poem, which is essentially untranslatable, is constructed in elaborately dramatic rhythms, transposing briskly from one metre to another, with sonorous musical effects, and boldly

breaking into slang next to ornate literary language. After 'The Twelve' and 'The Scythians'—a rhetorical challenge to the hostile Western nations—Blok hardly wrote any more, and though the Soviet authorities kept him busy with various translation schemes fostered by Gorky and Lunacharsky, he sank ever deeper into a state of disenchanted despondency. In 'The Scythians', Blok had launched a threatening appeal to the European countries to cease fighting revolutionary Russia, which in the past had sheltered them from the inroads of barbarian nomads from the East, but was itself Asiatic.

Yes, we are Scythians, with our slanting and avid eyes
 We shall no longer be your shield . . .
 For the last time, old world, we bid you come,
 Feast brotherly within our walls.
 To share our peace and glowing toil
 Once only the barbarian lyre calls.

A new literary group, also brought up on symbolism, and rebelling against its limitations, went further than Blok in formulating a constructive line of advance. These were the 'Acmeists' (the queer pretentious name was originally given to them by unfriendly critics) who took shape in Petersburg about 1912, when the poets S. Gorodetsky (b. 1881), and N. Gumilev (1885–1921), pupils respectively of Balmont and Bryusov, produced a manifesto outlining their aims. They declared war against the shadowy, vague, and fantastic in art, and raised healthy objections to the self-conscious and sickly preoccupation which laboriously sought metaphysical significance in every verbal image. As Gorodetsky expressed it: 'The rose by its petals, fragrance, and colouring, was again beautiful in itself, and not

because of its spiritual similarity to mystical love or anything else.' For the new school words in literature did not need to be musical or intellectually suggestive so long as they were concrete, vivid and fresh, and conveyed an immediate and substantial impression of the things which they described. Fundamentally this was a return to realism, though to a realism fully awake to the concrete individuality of personal experiences and objects. In the firm appeal which it made to poets to maintain a spontaneous outlook and to work hard at their technique, it reacted keenly against the debilitating excesses of the symbolists and their anaemic spiritualism. The foundation of 'the Guild of Poets' by the Acmeists indicated the importance which this group attached to conscientious craftsmanship and technical skill. Their most vital spirit was Gumilev, an adventurous wanderer, who travelled in Europe, hunted lions in Africa, enlisted as an ordinary soldier in 1914, and wrote romantic and stoical verse. The following lines give a glimpse of his style and that of his group, and incidentally forecast his own death at the hands of a Soviet firing squad:

I love like an Arab in the desert,
 Who flings himself on water and drinks
 Not like a knight in a picture
 Who looks at the stars and thinks
 I shall not die in a bedroom
 With a priest and a lawyer beside me.
 I shall perish in a terrible ravine
 With a mass of wild ivy to hide me.

The poetry of Anna Akhmatova (*b.* 1895), the principal survivor of this movement, has similar visual

qualities, and though rather tenuously personal, it achieves a simple felicitous compactness of imagery which is the outcome of hidden skill and labour.

This return from above to a renewed concrete clarity, on the part of those entangled intellectuals who had strayed farthest into the clouds, was gathering momentum before the October Revolution, and it met half-way the main impulse of another realistic revival which Maxim Gorky was leading from below with all the stimulating vigour of his pagan and rebellious spirit.

VIII

MAXIM GORKY AND LITERATURE AFTER THE OCTOBER REVOLUTION

MAXIM GORKY is almost equally famous as one of the great Russian literary artists and as the principal welder of Marxist thought into the Russian literary tradition. It stands to reason that before studying Gorky's work as a whole we should be acquainted, if not with the general ferment and transformation wrought by Marxism in Russia, at least with some of its earlier points of impact on Russian literature. Marxism had become a powerful movement in Russia during the last decade of the nineteenth century. Its chief ideological rival was an almost moribund agrarian socialism, which it soon supplanted. By its pseudo-scientific but dogmatic formulation, by its misleadingly simplified economic view of history, but principally by its call to action in the shape of class-warfare, it managed to attract not only discontented members of the small urban working-class, but also a large number of thwarted intellectuals, who were sick of inconclusive theories, and were quite prepared to plunge, with true Russian impetuosity, from an extreme height of abstract thought into an opposite extreme of violent action. It provided a stimulating sequence to the despondent feeling, aesthetically reflected in the literature of Chekhov and his contemporaries, that the desperate ills of Russia demanded recourse to an equally desperate remedy.

Any comparison of nineteenth-century Russia

with western Europe must, of course, take into account that spontaneous individualism was still a rare and exotic growth in a country which had been virtually untouched as a whole by the Renaissance, the Reformation, the French Revolution, and parliamentary liberalism, and by all that these contributed to the enrichment of human personality in the West. A fundamentally different conception, the religious sense of 'sobornost', the 'community' of the orthodox church, stressing the littleness of the individual and the strength of a spiritual union, had been deeply implanted in Russian society. A major reason why Marxism conquered Russian minds so easily was because it put the social collective above the individual, and found the majority of Russians predisposed by centuries of habit to accept the subordination of personality to the organized power of church and state: only a dogmatic historical fatalism was now substituted for the more intuitive religious one.

Marx turned Hegel upside down and took over his dialectic, according to which history inevitably advances through opposing thrusts of thesis and anti-thesis, action and reaction. This gives a rough and ready description of the way in which some historical processes actually work, but very few thinkers have accepted that sweeping universality of its application to human society which Marx claimed for his form of dialectical materialism. Nor did he himself apply this cardinal principle of change to Communist society, which he seems to have assumed as fundamentally changeless once it had been achieved. Any intellectual doubt was, however, promptly cast aside by the Marxist convert's fanatical faith in his

mission to reform society, a faith fortified by his convenient assumption that he was swimming with the tide of history: the next change in the tide, or how soon it would occur, did not concern him. Moreover, Marxism was the latest intellectual fashion from Europe, for which the Westernizers were always eagerly on the look-out. It exercised all the fascination of a new religion on minds made sick by frustrated striving and by the apathy of Russia in the 'nineties. .

This revivalist mood was expressed by one of its early adherents, Professor S. Bulgakov (who later became a 'revisionist', and finally a monk) when he described Marxism as 'a source of courage and active optimism, the militant slogan of young Russia, its social ferment'.

This is no place to enlarge on the series of battles and schisms through which Russian Marxism evolved; the opposition to populists and social revolutionaries, the fight with the revisionists (S. Bulgakov, N. Berdyaev,¹ P. Struve), the culminating schism within the Russian Social Democratic party in 1903, when it split into Bolsheviks (majority men), and Mensheviks (minority men). These factional fights and individual thinkers, including Plekhanov,² made their mark on literature, but principally as a reflection of the political struggle. It was left to Maxim Gorky to attempt a systematic adaptation of Russian literature and art to the spirit of dialectical

¹ N. Berdyaev (b. 1874), is the author of several books on social and religious philosophy. At one time attracted by Marxism, he developed into an idealist and Orthodox mystic with a strongly individual standpoint.

² G. M. Plekhanov (1852-1918), a leading theorist of Russian Marxism.

materialism, and to its embodiment in the new Soviet State. Gorky was eminently suited for this task. A great imaginative writer, and an active Marxist long before the October Revolution, he personified the transition from the old literature to the new, and thanks to the high standing which he enjoyed as a literary genius, his later career as a critical exponent of 'Marxist culture' strongly influenced the formative period of Soviet literature.

The symbolists could legitimately repudiate bourgeois vulgarity, for they sprang from the most cultured urban upper middle class of the learned and liberal professions, and were connected with the semi-Europeanized noble and merchant families of Petersburg and Moscow. But there was another group in Russia which cherished a deeper hatred of the bourgeoisie, was much further removed from it, and shared none of its advantages. This was the mixed crowd of poor students, tramps, villagers seeking work in the towns, and social outcasts of all origins. These homeless erratically employed wanderers held themselves curiously aloof from the main body of settled society, to which no ties of self-interest or sentiment united them, and they had developed a sturdy independent spirit of their own. For the first time they discovered in their midst a brilliant writer who championed their aspirations and taught them to rely on themselves to fight for their own betterment. This writer was Maxim Gorky (1868-1936).

He was the first Russian novelist to side unequivocally with the strong, ruthless individual, starting with the vagabond, who was up in arms against organized society and put no faith in the

variegated ideals of populists, aesthetes, or religious mystics. In this way Gorky ran quite counter to the main tendency of Russian literature since Gogol, which sympathized with humble people, and admired the spiritually perplexed. In his novel, *Varenka Olesova*, he wrote with biting scorn of the démodé classical hero: 'The Russian hero is always silly, he is always sick of something, always thinking of something that cannot be understood, and is himself so miserable. And when he is married he talks all sorts of nonsense to his wife and then abandons her.' Gorky saw in the reckless courage of his dare-devil vagabonds a healthy vital force which he failed to find either in the intelligentsia, whom he despised for bourgeois 'philistinism', or in the amorphous townspeople, or in the ignorant peasant masses. In his *Recollections* he thus described his feelings when he heard populists lecturing to students about 'the people'. 'With astonishment, and reluctant to believe it myself, I felt that I could not approach the subject in the same light as these men. To them the people embodied wisdom, spiritual beauty, and kind-heartedness and were a depository for the principles of the good, the beautiful, and the sublime. *I never knew such a people.*' But the vagabonds belonged to a different world, romanticized by Gorky for its roaming freedom. 'I have decided to go all over the world,' says one of his tramps. 'You always see something new, you think of nothing. The wind blows, and you might say it blows the dust out of your soul. You feel free and easy. If you are hungry, you stop and work to earn a few pennies: if there is no work to be had, you ask for some bread and it is given you.' The insatiable greed for life

shown by these outcasts came as a refreshing shock and novelty to many Russian readers. Thus hitherto mute, stultified souls in dark places, suddenly becoming conscious and articulate, irresistibly push their way upwards towards the light. 'It is to beauty that we must look for the meaning of life and to the energy of the will.' These words of Gorky show from the start the underlying motives running through his imaginative work.

Though Gorky the artist could not tolerate any form of intellectual sectarianism, his restless craving for action, his love of muscular energetic heroes, and hatred of all established society (including the peasantry) drew him into close sympathy with certain articles of the Marxist faith where he could find through them an outlet for his broad humanitarian feelings. He became a member of the Social-Democratic party at the end of the century and his stories contributed a lot to the success of the Marxist review *Jizn*, where they also helped to form the outlook of the Russian workman. Gorky gave generously from his literary earnings to poor socialist friends and he became one of the financial powers behind the revolutionary movement. In the years following the revolution, the rescue of many writers and other intellectuals from starvation or destitution was largely due to his untiring efforts in organizing work and financial support for them.

The amazing story of his own life is told in his autobiographical series, *Childhood* (1913), *Among Strangers* (1915), *My Universities* (1923), and *Recollections* (1924). His father, Maxim Peshkov, was an upholsterer, and his mother the daughter of

a dyer. He was only five when his father died, and he went to live with his maternal grandparents. Here in *Childhood* we have those unforgettable portraits of his mean, brutal grandfather, and of his wonderfully courageous and loving grandmother. 'When she spoke, she sang the words, and they took root in my memory like flowers, they were so affectionate, bright and alluring. When she smiled, her dark, cherry-like pupils distended with a pleasant light; the smile lit up her strong white teeth, and despite the many wrinkles in the dark skin of her cheeks, her whole face seemed young and radiant. It was only spoilt by the shapeless nose with its dilated nostrils—red at the end. Her dark colouring was lit up from inside—through the eyes—by a gay and warming glow, which nothing could extinguish. She stooped, till she was almost hunchbacked; but she was plump and moved nimbly, just like a big cat. Before she came into my life, I seemed to be asleep, hidden in the darkness; but when she appeared, she awoke me, brought me out into the world, tied everything around me with firm, inextricable threads, wove them into many-coloured lace, and straight away she became my friend for life, the closest to my heart, the most understandable and dearest person. Her uncorrupted love enriched me and filled me with strength for the tasks ahead of me.' She would not be the ideal *babushka*¹ without the inexhaustible stock of folk-tales which she told 'quietly, mysteriously, leaning over me, looking into my eyes with her distended pupils, pouring vigour into my soul and lifting up my heart. She speaks as if she were singing, and the longer she

¹ Grandmother.

goes on, the more entralling the words sound. It is inexpressibly agreeable to listen to her.'

Gorky's grandparents, the Kashirins, were growing steadily poorer, and after his mother died, his grandfather brusquely turned him out of the house and cast him adrift in the world to earn his own living. He toiled at a multitude of odd jobs and was often out of work. He was in turn a bootmaker's apprentice, a pantry boy on a Volga steamer, a nightwatchman and a worker in an underground bakery (perfectly described in his story, *Twenty-Six Men and a Girl*). He somehow scraped together an education, and Korolenko, who saw what was in him, helped him to publish his first stories. He continued to specialize in stories till the beginning of the nineties.

In this second period, which lasted till shortly before the first world war, he devoted himself to his long problem novels of society and to his dramas. Afterwards he wrote his autobiographical works and memoirs, and finally launched out on a vast number of polemical articles and speeches, guiding the uncertain steps of the new Soviet literature. In 1902, at the early age of thirty-three, he had been elected an honorary member of the Academy of Sciences, but his election was annulled by the government. His early stories contain masterpieces like *The Old Woman Izergil*, *Malva*, and *Tchelkash*; many, like his plays, are marred by an overdose of rambling conversations about the meaning of life, and have contributed to some old-fashioned European's odd idea of Russia as a queer country, teeming with verbose philosophical rogues and idealistic prostitutes. That tensely concentrated story, *Twenty-Six*

Men and a Girl is freest from Gorky's typical literary defects. The twenty-six men work silently in their prison, an underground bakery, stifled by the horrible atmosphere and barely kept alive by a miserable wage. One thing only saves them from being utterly brutalized—in a more normal life it would have seemed quite trivial—the regular visits of a light-hearted young girl who comes every day to take some of their loaves. She simply comes in, exchanges a few words and goes off—but this radiant apparition is somehow enough to keep alive their faith in human nature and purity. A cynical soldier who starts work nearby boasts that he will seduce her, takes on a bet and wins it. The bakers, on learning what has happened, are stunned—it was as if the bottom had fallen out of their lives—then they savagely insult the fallen girl. When they return to their loathsome work, the sunshine for them had irretrievably vanished. They 'hated their work with a sharp hatred': for sixteen hours on end, 'sitting at a long table opposite each other—nine facing nine—we mechanically moved our arms and fingers, and were so much accustomed to it that we did not even watch our movements. We had sat staring at each other, day after day, so that each of us knew every wrinkle on the face of his comrade. We had nothing to talk about: we were used to that and kept silent, when we did not curse—for one can always find someone to abuse, particularly a comrade. But even cursing was rare. For how could one blame a man for anything if he was already half-dead, inert like a wooden image, if all his feelings were maimed by the sheer weight of labour? But silence brings terror and torment only

to those who have already said everything they had to say; for people who have not yet begun to speak, silence is simple and easy.'

The brilliance of Gorky's best stories and personal reminiscences is not matched by his novels and plays, most of which were written between 1900 and 1914. He lacked the constructive sense of proportion and building up from a foundation, so necessary for sustained imaginative works. His chief novels, which often begin magnificently, are boldly drawn but sprawling pictures of Russian provincial life, reproducing its dark barbaric squalor and almost heart-breaking frustration, from which only a few strong-willed individuals emerge into the light. The most memorable of these novels is *Foma Gordeev* (1899), a study of the merchant class. Foma is the son of a wealthy merchant who made his fortune in the Volga shipping trade. Foma's father, one of Gorky's most powerful characters, is thus described: 'Strongly built, handsome, and no fool, he was one of those people who are always bound to be successful, not because they are particularly talented or industrious, but because, buoyed up by enormous reserves of energy, they drive straight towards their goal, without pondering over their choice of methods, and recognizing no law other than their own desires. Sometimes they speak with remorse about their conscience, now and then genuinely tormented by its scruples—but conscience is an unconquerable force only for the faint-hearted—the strong soon overcome it and enslave it to their own desires, instinctively aware that if they were to give rein to its free promptings, it would break up their lives.' Foma inherits his father's wealth, but he does not

know what to do with it or with himself, for he is weak-willed and overcome by an unconquerable repulsion for his fellow-merchants and their ways. He takes to drink, seeks forgetfulness in wild orgies, and ends up as an imbecile.

Gorky's plays resemble Chekhov's in form but in no other way. The only one to achieve fame was *The Lower Depths*, and the success of this, which was tremendous both abroad and in Russia—where it sold out fourteen editions in one year (1903)—owed more to its sensational novelty than to any lasting literary merits. Its motley collection of outcasts, tramps, criminals, and prostitutes, indulging in long metaphysical discussions, captured the imagination of a jaded theatre-going public, surfeited with conventional and classical plays. The previously mentioned autobiographical works of Gorky's last artistic period are likely to be by far the most permanent memorials of his literary genius. Their penetrating power of observation is tremendous, and in spite of the wide perspective of horror and gloom revealed by his ruthless portrayal of the facts, Gorky's undaunted optimism prevails. His thirst for useful knowledge, his love of beauty and vigorous life, throb beneath the surface and force their way through the ugly and sordid scene which he saw around him.

Gorky, the imaginative artist, the last great literary figure of the pre-revolutionary era, can be clearly distinguished from Gorky the busy organizer and doctrinaire exponent of new Soviet literary canons. Of course his legendary fame as a rebel artist in the old régime made his capacity for action in the new one more unassailable. Though he never

applied his new theories to his own imaginative work (which even after the revolution was all retrospective) he saw the dangers threatening literature in the Soviet state and made valiant efforts to save it from artistic collapse. Inspiring human ideals had to be conjured up from the arid intellectual jargon of Marx, and established in place of the various forms of Slavophil and Westernizing inspiration which the revolution had dislocated. Also the new impulse had to be reconciled with strict guidance by dogma in order to avoid artistic chaos in a revolutionary era, for no such resolute leadership was forthcoming from the 'non-party' intelligentsia, still less from the ignorant populace.

Gorky had first launched on this work of 're-education' when he founded the literary periodical *Znanie* (Knowledge) which, after the relaxation of state censorship in 1905, was able to turn into an outspoken organ of the Marxist intelligentsia, among whom were figures of considerable literary power, including E. Chirikov (b. 1864), V. Veresaev (1867-1945), and Skitalets (pseudonym of S. Petrov, (b. 1868). Later, an idealistic experimental school, founded and financially supported by Gorky during his exile in Capri, and not entirely on Marxist lines, was devoted to the education of a proletarian nucleus for the embryonic future art and science of humanity. There he was inundated with manuscripts sent to him from all over Russia by self-taught men seeking his patronage, and he wrote of them: 'Many of these works are illiterate and will never be published, though they bear the stamp of a human soul.' In general, he warned against exaggerated expectations that literature would take on a new lease of life

immediately after the October Revolution. 'Soviet literature,' he wrote, 'cannot produce a *War and Peace* because, together with the mass of creative talents in the Soviet Union, it lives in a constant state of war with the old world and in the strained creation of a new one.' History shows that the formation of any new culture demands a considerable time. It was obvious that all the energy of the revolutionaries would be absorbed at the start in the thorough-going destruction of obstacles to their conquest of power and then, at the next stage, in applying that power first of all to securing the most urgent and basic needs of existence. 'The hero of our days is the scientist, the inventor, the constructor.' While admitting that a new society must be built before the new literature could speak with a clear voice, Gorky already made the complaint, so often repeated by lesser critics, that literature failed to keep pace with the grandeur and achievements of actual life. Why had the grand new themes born in the October Revolution not yet found poets or artists worthy of them? Next to this complaint came the admission that too many writers were plainly uninspired or depressed by contemporary developments around them and therefore indifferent to their 'educative tasks'.

The first Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934 crystallized the literary trend of 'socialist realism', and Gorky's lengthy speech on that occasion merits close study as his own interpretation of how that formula should be applied in practice to mark the proper differentiation of Soviet literature from the great Russian literature of the past. This speech was vigorously lucid, sincere and plausible in its

aims, though absurdly distorted and meagre in its summing up of pre-revolutionary literature. 'Social and cultural progress,' he said, 'develops normally only when the hands teach the head, after which the head, now grown wiser, teaches the hands, and the wise hands once again, this time even more effectively, promote the growth of the mind. . . . The head becomes severed from the hands and thought from the earth. Speculative dreamers made their appearance among the mass of active men. They sought to explain the world and the growth of ideas in the abstract, independently of the labour processes which change the world in accordance with the aims and interests of man. . . . It is important to note that pessimism is entirely foreign to folklore, despite the fact that the creators of folklore lived a hard life. . . . The hero of folklore, the simpleton, despised even by his father and brothers always turns out to be wiser than they, always triumphs over life's adventures, just as did Vasillissa the Wise. . . . If the notes of despair and doubt in the meaning of terrestrial existence are sometimes heard in folklore, such notes are traceable to the influence of the Christian Church which has preached pessimism for 2000 years.

'The main and fundamental theme of pre-revolutionary literature was the tragedy of a person to whom life seemed cramped, who felt superfluous in society, sought therein a comfortable place, failed to find it and suffered, died or reconciled himself to a society that was hostile to him, or sank to drunkenness or suicide. In our Union of Socialist Soviets, there should not, and cannot be, superfluous people. One thing only is demanded of personality. Be

honest in your attitude to the heroic work of creating a classless society. It should be realized that critical realism originated as the individual creation of "superfluous" people, who being incapable of the struggle for existence, not finding a place in life, and more or less clearly realizing the aimlessness of personal being, understood this aimlessness merely as the senselessness of all phenomena in social life and in the whole historical process.

"The proletarian state must educate thousands of first-class "craftsmen of culture", "engineers of the soul". This is necessary in order to restore to the whole mass of the working people the right to develop their intelligence, talents, and faculties. . . . This places us not only in the position, traditional to realist literature, of judges of the world and men, critics of life, but gives us the right to participate directly in the construction of a new life, in the process of "changing the world". The possession of this right should impress every writer with a sense of responsibility for all literature, and for all the aspects of it which should not be there."

This Writers' Congress of 1934, in which Gorky played so prominent a part, was a landmark in the shifting relations between the Soviet Government and Soviet men of letters. We shall return to it in the next chapter, where it fits into the main chronological sequence other than its connexion with Gorky.

LITERATURE AFTER THE OCTOBER REVOLUTION

The purely negative character of the Tsarist censorship, oppressive though it was, had not been able to stop the growth of a spontaneous, brilliant, and

flourishing literature, which included tendencies hostile to the state and sowing the seeds of its dissolution. Russian literature before the revolution could by elusive imagery surreptitiously promote subversive ideas, and after the censorship relaxations of 1905, it could even overtly advocate Marxist doctrines. After the October Revolution the old negative censorship was reimposed—with a certain leniency to start with—but it was for the first time strengthened by something entirely new—unknown in Tsarist Russia—by a set of positive rules and exhortations emanating from the state. Russian authors prior to 1917 were neither expected nor compelled to sing paeans of praise to the Tsar, but the Bolshevik adoption of the maxim 'Whoever is not for us is against us', made an attitude of genuinely objective or fastidious neutrality extremely difficult for any writer who wished to survive under Soviet rule.

During the Civil War the Soviet Government was too busy struggling for its own survival to pay much systematic attention to literature, which, being left largely to its own devices and without any outstanding individual genius, was dominated in turn by various rival groups formed before the revolution, who now competed both for the artistic leadership of the broken groping culture and for the all-important official favour of the Soviet authorities.

First in the field were the Soviet futurists,¹ headed by V. Mayakovsky (1894–1930). They originated

¹ The talented poet Boris Pasternak (b. 1890), started as a futurist but soon developed a rather obscurely personal style in poetry and prose. He is also noted for his excellent translations into Russian of Shakspere, Goethe, Verlaine, and Kleist.

as an offshoot of the Italian futurism of Marinetti, who had launched the fashion of a 'telegraphic' literary style which was alleged to express most aptly the spirit of an era of telephones, aeroplanes, and skyscraper towns. Destructive derision of all inherited traditional taste was the most distinguishing mark of the Russian futurists' manifesto published in 1912, which urged: 'Throw Pushkin, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, etc., overboard from the steamer of modernity.' Mayakovsky's own poetry has been both absurdly overrated as the discovery of a new 'proletarian' style and excessively abused as distorted, coarse, bombastic mob-oratory; in fact it had an explosive revolutionary exuberance which was excellently suited to the new practice of declamation at street corners and in clubs and cabarets. While many intellectuals tried to preserve a non-committal attitude to the new régime, Mayakovsky had whole-heartedly identified himself with it and burst at once into stirring revolutionary propaganda verse. Full of sound and fury, he successfully out-shouted his competitors and for a time the futurists obtained enough official support to become the virtual dictators in literature and art. Mayakovsky had prophesied: 'I shall reveal to you—with words—as plain as mooing—our new souls.' But his triumph was short-lived; even if his own verse was not intentionally eccentric or obscure, that of his followers was very much worse, and could not be made comprehensible to the multitude, nor was it sufficiently disciplined or malleable to present a lasting agitational value for communist party policy.

Futurism thus led into a blind alley and soon fell from official favour, though Mayakovsky, who had

never been completely identified with the movement, retained much of his own popularity. His lively gift of mocking invective was not always directed against the capitalist world, and he wrote two satirical plays about Russian everyday life—*Bathhouse* and *Bedbug*—which were banned by the Soviet authorities. Of course the Futurists were not liquidated overnight, and their decline was due as much to individual boredom with their monotonous artificial and blatant style as it was to official disapproval of their inadequate ideology. Lenin himself declared: 'I understand Pushkin, I appreciate both him and Nekrasov, but as to Mayakovsky, I am sorry, I do not understand him.'

It is usual to mention Mayakovsky together with his contemporary, Esenin, as rival leaders of the two most popular poetic movements in the early revolutionary period. Sergei Esenin (1895–1925), was a genuine peasant poet, whose fame, first achieved when the symbolists were in fashion, was greatly enhanced after the revolution. His pure lyrical talent and fervent religious love of nature, folklore, and the Russian countryside, became mingled with daring modernistic images, which he acquired under the temporary but superficial influence of the 'advanced' literary and intellectual groups. He remained at heart an emotional Slavophil and an eternal child of the Russian village: after believing with enthusiasm that the revolution would at last realize the cherished dreams of the Russian peasant and craftsman, he was bound to be disillusioned by its relentlessly urban, mechanical, and industrial character. But his passionate poetry became so immensely popular in the early 'twenties that he

was denounced by communist circles as a disintegrating influence. Penetrated by the feeling that he was fighting for a lost cause, he took to drink and to a riotous Bohemian life, and ended by committing suicide. 'Why the devil did I shout so loudly in my songs that I am a friend of the people?' he wrote. 'My poetry is no longer needed here, and I, too—by your leave—I am no longer needed.'

After the eclipse of the Futurists, the Proletkult, which stepped into the breach, advanced even more sweeping claims to represent 'proletarian art' and to control and manage every branch of it from literature to music and the theatre. This ambitious organization demanded that culture should be an autonomous sphere quite separated from the machinery of the state, but it nevertheless aspired to 'control' cultural activity with the same strict all-embracing efficiency as the communist party controlled political organization.

In 1921 the Proletkult passed a resolution solemnly condemning futurism as an ideological trend of the last period of imperialistic bourgeois decadence, antagonistic to the proletariat as a class. Its moving spirit was originally Gorky's friend and collaborator in exile, the thinker and pedagogue, A. Bogdanov: but in spite of its undeniable drive and some influential support, this group was far too dryly theoretical to strike roots, and it failed to see that the first prerequisite of any proletarian culture must be a rise in the abysmally low standard of education. Lenin was sceptical about the Proletkult, and other enlightened communists came to the disconcerting conclusion that there was no such thing as proletarian culture at all—nor ever would be. It appeared

that the proletariat, starting as a class, must go on fighting for enough power to enable it to shed class-consciousness, and then another 'classless' human culture might arise—if by that time all culture had not been squeezed out or blown to bits in the process. So the broad civilization of the future, notwithstanding political revolutions, could only unfold organically and by stages: it could neither be artificially manufactured from quick recipes nor compressed within the hateful confines of a real or imaginary class struggle. The self-conscious and flowery abstractions of those early practitioners of proletarian literature, the poets of 'The Forge' were pathetically feeble, and only bore witness to Lenin's good sense when he said 'to enable art to reach the people and the people to approach art, we must first raise the general level of education and culture'.

The period of war-communism, with its enraptured confusion, heroic strife, and poetic innovation, came to an end in 1921 when the New Economic Policy was introduced. This phase of temporary compromise provided a few years' breathing space in which the violent emotions of the preceding period could be assimilated and moulded into a more coherent shape. Fragmentary, apocalyptic, and fantastic poetry yielded place to a revival of more substantial realistic prose with a wider range of expression, and the rich documentary literature of the Civil War began to appear in the novels and stories of those young writers who had fought through it.¹ Many of these prose works undoubtedly sprang from the inner necessity to record and extract

¹ I. Babel (b. 1894), V. Ivanov (b. 1895), and B. Pilnyak (b. 1894), are three outstanding writers of this period.

some core of sense from the cruel and shattering experiences of civil chaos and guerrilla warfare which had convulsed the whole of Russia. But their interest still centres round the most romantic, sensational, and scarcely credible features of those terrible years; they tend inevitably to be episodic, detaching certain memorable incidents which stand out sharply against a shapeless mass of upheaval, too tremendous and disparate to be grasped in its entirety by even the most powerful imagination. Some critics said that these writers obscured the solemn significance of the period by paying too much attention to trivial and macabre detail. The novelist Pilnyak voiced this underlying feeling when he wrote: 'Seas and plateaux have changed places. For in Russia there is the beautiful agony of birth. For the waters are muddy with the high floods from the black earth. This *I* know, but *they* see lice in the dirt.' In 'they', Pilnyak referred to pedants and dreamers who through defects of vision saw only disorder, lice, and mud, and he compared them to short-sighted ants which cannot understand the beauty of a statue because they perceive nothing but the small projections and grooves as they creep over it. His own novels and stories, while attempting to grasp the whole of war-communism intellectually, failed to transpose it into artistic imagery. He conjured up a jerky startling procession of sharp silhouettes and rapid sketches, but without any unifying grip to tie these bits and pieces together.

Some of the leading artistic chroniclers of the Civil War belonged to the group called 'The Serapion Brothers', which included N. Nikitin (b. 1897), a

proletarian heretic who conceived art as one of the absolutes of freedom, and M. Zoschenko. (b. 1895) who enlisted in the Russian Army in 1915 while a law student at St. Petersburg University, and through his humorous, grotesque, and satirical stories eventually achieved a wider popularity than any of his fellow 'brothers'. His daring use of jokes and satire in describing contemporary life in Russia involved him in periodic scrapes with the Communist Party watchdogs, and in 1946 he was publicly disgraced and expelled from the Union of Soviet Writers. Other writers of varied origin, who reinforced this courageous group were V. Kaverin (b. 1902), a university graduate in literary history, Vsyevolod Ivanov (b. 1895), an acrobat and jack-of-all-trades, K. Fedin (b. 1892), a peasant with some city education who had spent four years as a prisoner-of-war in Germany. Self-protection of spontaneous artistic realism from political dictates was the major principle which held the Serapions together. N. Lunz (1901-24), a young lecturer at St. Petersburg University, and a guiding spirit of the group, thus described its origin: 'We became friends during revolutionary days, the days of the severest political tension. In both right and left wings it was said, "Whoever is not with us, is against us". With whom are you? With the communists or against the communists? With the revolution or against the revolution? We are with Serapion the Anchorite, was our answer. So it is with our stories, novels and dramas, but there is one thing which is demanded of all of us; that the voice should ring true, that we should believe in the reality of the production irrespective of its colour. . . . Art is as real as life, and like

life has no aim or reason; existing simply because it must exist.' Nikitin was equally uncompromising when he pointed out that a writer, left to himself, will be loyal to whatever is most progressive in his time, need never be mercenary and cannot in any case create good work if he is dragged about by the scruff of the neck and if every line he writes is scrutinized for its immediate social significance. The dislocation of printing during the period of war-communism was yet another factor which helped to create friendly literary circles who passed manuscripts round from hand to hand, and the Serapion Brothers used to meet regularly at friends' houses and read their works aloud to each other.

The Serapions' undeniable talent won temporary toleration from the authorities, but their independent attitude to literature was quite irreconcilable with party orthodoxy. Trotsky wrote of them acidly that 'in their search for artistic individuality they try to get away from the revolution which has been their environment and in which milieu they have yet to find themselves. If the Serapions could get away from the revolution entirely, they would reveal themselves at once as a second-rate or third-rate remnant of the discarded pre-revolutionary literary schools.' Evidently the group could not last long in its precarious oasis, and the courses pursued by its individual members soon diverged. A number of them were drawn into an even looser grouping and became known as the 'Fellow-Travellers'. This name was not of their own choosing, and it expressed a reserved form of recognition from the Soviet authorities. They were admitted—thus far but no farther—as gifted professionals whose sympathies and outlook had

been decisively shaped by the revolution, but who were not political converts and must be sharply differentiated from genuine communists. They were not the artists of the revolution, but only its artistic fellow-travellers. The new group included the former Serapions, Ivanov, and Fedin, the hitherto unlabelled writers B. Pilnyak, I. Babel, and L. Leonov, (b. 1899), the cosmopolitan Jew, Ilya Ehrenburg (b. 1891), and the returned *émigré* Alexei Tolstoy (1882–1945).

While the licensed approval secured by these writers aroused some measure of non-party satisfaction and even reassurance, it encountered violent rivalry from the opposite camp of proletarian intellectuals. An enterprising section of these published a magazine called *On Guard*, the outlook of which was thus described by the communist critic Voron-sky, editor of the literary periodical *Red Virgin Soil*: 'This generation had borne arms, but now instead of carrying a heavy rifle, these youths handle pen and paper. They are strong, hardy, eager, mirthful, conceited, and absolutely self-reliant. They are accustomed to taking everything by storm: so give them Europe, give them schools, science, and art. They abound in youthful enthusiasm and they are reluctant to set themselves any limits. . . . Rather unmannerly, they step on your feet, they spit, and they talk arrogant nonsense.' Indeed, the excesses of the 'On Guardists' upset not only the Fellow-Travellers but a number of the soberer proletarian writers as well. Mutual recrimination became so violent that the Central Committee of the Communist Party decided to intervene, with the result that in 1925 it issued a lengthy and illuminating

directive expounding party politics in the sphere of literature with a frank acknowledgment that the problem of artistic literature 'is a far more complicated one than others presented to the proletariat for solution' and that 'the class origin of art in general and of literature in particular is expressed in forms infinitely more varied than it is, for instance, in politics'. The upshot of the party's resolution was a compromise which sanctioned a continuation of competition between the rival literary groups and tendencies, with a balance of firm support to Voronsky in his stand against the extravagant claims of the 'On Guardists'. The latter were found guilty of 'pretentious, semi-literate, and self-satisfied bragging'.

Once it was honestly admitted that the culturally backward proletariat had not yet been able to work out any specific artistic form and style, but was obliged to exercise patience and industry in order to learn from what survived of the old culture, then it followed that attempts to force overnight the growth of a hothouse 'proletarian literature' must be censured as amateurish and dangerous.

Whereas the Fellow-Travellers, for their part, were quite agreeable to let the proletarians write to their hearts' content, provided they themselves could be left in comparative peace to go ahead with their own work, the extremist cliques could not tolerate the existence of even a small number of good writers who did not subscribe to their political dogmas. The numerous inferior writers and artists, strongly organized in groups, were out to strangle the few superior but more politically isolated ones; in this case only the timely and judicious intervention

of the Communist Party prevented the more talented Fellow-Travellers from falling victims to the petty tyranny and envy of their literary opponents. 'Communist criticism must banish the tone of literary command. This criticism will only then acquire a deep educational significance when it relies on the intrinsic superiority of its ideas. The party must use every means to eradicate arbitrary and incompetent administrative interference in the affairs of literature. (*Pravda*, No. 147, 1925.)

The later policy of the Communist Party, to formulate and assign to literature as to every other sphere of activity a series of practical circumscribed tasks, guided by party members from inside the professional groups, did not get properly into its stride till the beginning of the Five Year Plans. But after a period of trial and error this policy was also acknowledged to have failed in its object, and was radically revised in 1932.

The end of the New Economic Policy (1927) and the beginning of the first Five Year Plan (1928) brought literature into the third main phase of its existence since the revolution, the two preceding ones coinciding approximately with the Civil War and the duration of the New Economic Policy.

Conscientious attempts were being made to depict the revolution less episodically, to see it in a less cosmic and theoretical light, and to endow it with a fuller sense of deliberate human purpose. Hence arose the desire to eliminate the mere descriptive narrative of stirring events and to introduce a more direct psychological approach. In order to steer clear of the pitfalls of 'bourgeois psychology' man's

inner development had to be represented not as a thing in itself with its own centre of gravity, but as following a course predetermined by the constructive influence of its social environment. Unforeseen complications arose from the stubborn survival of the politically unwanted, who were no longer confined to the old middle class, since the unmasking of saboteurs, the collectivization of agriculture, and the party purges of the disappointed or insufficiently co-operative, created huge numbers of new 'superfluous people' from the ranks of the working class and peasantry. Their problems, though they could never be loudly voiced in Soviet literature, formed a tragic factual background to the constant literary theme of compulsory individual immolation on the altar of the new state.

Both the left and right wings of the proletarian writers acknowledged that the triumphant workman, the hero of the revolution and the fighter for a better future, was most inadequately and sketchily personified in literature. This deficiency was even more sharply felt during the first Five Year Plan period, when any literary work which did not manifest enthusiastic collaboration in constructional work was liable to become politically suspect. Even cynical Ehrenburg turned his adaptable hand to writing a novel about the building of blast furnaces (*The Second Day*). Full speed ahead in the development of industry and collectivized agriculture was the order of the day, which had to be fulfilled at a price, and literature could only justify its existence by sharing in the struggle. 'Literature must help the plan' was the new slogan of the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers. Diverse approaches

to literary themes, hitherto tolerated both in Fellow-Travellers and proletarians, now ran dangerously close to political deviations, unless they could prove their credentials by contributing to the homogeneous drive for socialist construction.

The demand for a more vivid and tangible individualization of the new people formed under the pressure of events since 1917 had been partially fulfilled by the realistic early novels of A. Fadeyev (b. 1901), L. Leonov (b. 1899), and M. Sholokhov (b. 1900). The latter's *And Quiet Flows the Don* is written in glowing and eloquent prose, and treats with considerable insight the Cossacks' mode of life and outlook before and after the revolution. Both this novel and Fadeyev's *The Rout* show a certain analytical austerity, a reaction from romantic revolutionary rapture towards an authentic study of the 'dramatis personae', the all-enduring partisans of the civil war with their ruthless cruelty and admirable resolution, the ordinary primitive people with their mute unquestioning suffering, the intellectuals in their varied roles of sternly efficient organizers, shifty traitors, or irresolute 'Hamlets' unfitted to adapt themselves to the harder life. Many more lifelike intermediate shades crept into the simple black and white psychology of good revolutionaries and their 'reactionary' opponents. Leonov's novel, *The Badgers*, achieves some historical objectivity by its impartial description of enemies of the Soviet Government in the shape of peasant guerrilla bands, joined by Red Army deserters, who were resisting the Soviet authorities and their tax collectors.

With the beginning of the first Five Year Plan,

civil war subjects mostly dropped out, but the franker analysis of inner motives and spiritual conflicts continued to be applied in the more remarkable of the many Five Year Plan novels, e.g. Sholokhov's *The Upturned Soil*, Pilnyak's *The Volga Flows into the Caspian Sea*, Kataev's *Forward, O Time*, and Gladkov's *Power*. Writers were whirled all over the country on visits to new industrial centres, factories, and collective farms, and their novels were expected to be both painstakingly documentary and morally stimulating to intensified industrial effort. Kataev's ecstatic descriptions of new machinery and of the competition to establish a world record in concrete-mixing sound naïve to the sophisticated foreigner, but they skilfully struck on the right note to stimulate the required mood of technical exaltation. Sholokhov's novel deals with the plan as applied to agriculture, does not shrink from describing the impassioned resistance made by the more prosperous peasants to enforced collectivization, and reveals tragic medley of idealism and brutality. As if in a second civil war, or in the last stage of defence against an alien invader, many small-holders desperately slaughter their cattle and burn or hide their crops. Collectivization triumphs, but a heavy price is paid for it in famine and human dislocation. Sholokhov's sombre and lifelike rendering of the struggle has an unusually high degree of artistic integrity, but it was not in harmony with the loud strains of official optimism on the same theme.

Pilnyak's novel is clearly too little inspired by the Five Year Plan to make his conscientious attempt at glorification sound at all convincing. Though he devotes plenty of space to describing the success

construction of an enormous dam and the exemplary qualities of the more ardent workers, his inner attention is focused on the contrast between the ancient semi-Asiatic Russia and the sudden inrush of twentieth-century machine materialism, between the elemental romantics of the revolution and its harshly matter-of-fact business directors. He can hardly conceal his personal sympathy for the earlier type of impetuous idealistic revolutionary. Leonov's *Sot* came nearer to concentrating interest on the Five Year Plan itself, but its struggles and triumphs are overshadowed by a deeper conflict of personalities. The novel describes the construction of a paper-mill in a remote corner of north-east Russia. Every kind of natural and human obstacle has to be overcome, including innate peasant conservatism and deliberate sabotage, but ultimately the work succeeds. In the underlying personal drama, however, the author has made his zealous communists, with their brazen cocksureness, less humanly interesting than his more variegated and flexible characters, some of them potential converts and others spiritually opposed to communism, but whose temperaments are the result of an ingrained heritage of feelings from the past, which could not be eradicated.

F. Gladkov's Five Year Plan novel *Power* does not stand comparison with his much more famous one *Cement*, first published in 1924. Indeed, the early novel, which was singled out by critics as having ushered in the new era of industrial reconstruction, may be said to have stolen in advance some of the thunder of the Five Year Plan themes, and it remains an instructive social document. Much of its spectacular success was due to its official

advertisement as the first novel of the kind written by a pure-blooded proletarian author, and to the fact that it analysed with some sense of balance the feelings of individuals in relation to their changed surroundings, while remaining ideologically orthodox. Its subject is the social heroism of a workman, who, on returning home from the front, finds the local cement factory in a chaotic state, and by his personal efforts and infectious enthusiasm gets it going again. Sabotage, bureaucratic inefficiency, even a bungling party purge, are each encountered and castigated with the correct degree of legitimate communist self-criticism. The workman, Gleb, overcomes all these material obstacles, but he is significantly defeated by the attempt to re-establish his family happiness. His wife, who has become a social worker, insists on independence from domestic cares and free relations with other men. Their child is neglected and dies of under-nourishment in a children's home. The handling of this situation strikes the unprejudiced reader as lame and artificial, especially when Gleb is shown reconciled to all personal disappointments through his elated absorption in the necessary work of restarting the factory. The unresolved matrimonial problem in *Cement* is one of the numerous attempts in Soviet literature to reconcile the new theory of 'free' biological love with satisfactory human relations and family responsibilities. Although a single and lasting love was deprecated in the literature of the 'twenties as a relic of 'bourgeois romanticism', the revolutionary protagonists of promiscuous sexual intercourse were soon defeated by the healthier instincts of the people as well as by the realization of the authorities that

even the all-powerful Soviet state could not afford to dispense with the family unit as a vital cell on which the vigour of the whole social organism depended. A new phase of communist puritanism quickly developed out of this reaction, by virtue of which sexual self-discipline, care for the family, self-restraint, and the cult of sport, were fitted into the scheme of social duties and hence of desirable literary themes.

As the Five Year Plan proceeded on its course it became evident that notwithstanding the mass of novels and stories turned out by the demands of socialist construction, both their literary quality and propaganda efficiency fell far below expectation. Even *Pravda* (October 4th, 1930) wrote plaintively about this baffled state of mind. 'Regardless of distance and unmindful of cost, our writers are sent to old and new concerns, to construction-works, to collective and state farms, on long cruises, polar expeditions, and record flights. In all fairness it must be admitted that our writers love to travel, but in an overwhelming majority of cases the application of their experiences to literature is either absent or extremely unsatisfactory.'

IX STABILIZATION?

IN 1932 the Central Committee of the Communist Party passed a resolution to abolish the proletarian organizations of writers, pointing out that the success of Five Year planning had made their continued existence superfluous. In their place was formed a single but more loosely constituted Union of Soviet Writers, embracing proletarians and all other literary groups, including the Fellow-Travellers. This development was accompanied by a perceptible relaxation of the strain imposed on writers in fulfilling a spate of politically motivated injunctions and by a greater emphasis on humanism linked with Russian folklore and ancient popular art, but brought into line with communist theories of humanity. Though in theory membership of the Union was voluntary, in practice writers who did not or could not join it forfeited advantages vital to professional success. Members were pledged by the statute of the Union to 'the creation of works of high artistic significance, saturated with the heroic struggle of the international proletariat, with the grandeur of the victory of socialism, and reflecting the great wisdom and heroism of the Communist Party'. Within these obvious limits a certain variety of styles and subjects was encouraged, and at the same time writers were exhorted by a new admonition to 'learn from the classics', in order to raise the standard of their literary art and remedy what were considered to be their merely technical defects.

The slogan of 'socialist realism' was also established at this time as a generic definition of the only approved artistic method. While it was intended to guard against any extreme deviations of outlook among writers, it was lenient by comparison with the immediately preceding period, in the amount of discretion which it left to the individual writer in his choice of themes and mode of presentation. The ruling principles of coercion and disciplined obedience were thus modified, however slightly, for a sphere in which some spontaneity was essential. The first All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers (1934) owed its most positive achievements to the guiding spirit of Gorky, as we have seen in the preceding chapter. But he dwelt chiefly on the vague vistas opened up for literature by 'Soviet humanism', on the old tradition of folklore linking labour with culture, and on the re-interpretation of Russian nineteenth-century literature in the light of to-day. He did not produce any clear definition of socialist realism, and the upshot of the speeches referring to the new literary movement was to explain its militant opposition to 'mysticism'—a term under which all expressions of any and every religious feeling were indiscriminately lumped together—and to stylistic experiments with form (Joyce's *Ulysses* was cited as an extreme example), such as appeared in European futurism and surrealism; the latter novelties had enjoyed a precarious vogue in Russia for a few years on the assumption that they were 'proletarian' and represented in 'advance', but they were later whole-heartedly condemned as the last formalistic refinements of bourgeois decadence'.

Indeed, socialist realism was almost conservative

in its abstention from imaginative flights. In some ways it indicated that Russia was resuming her tradition of healthy realism, of an art inspired by direct contact with human beings in a contemporary society; and the addition of the epithet 'socialist' registered in the first place the indisputable nature and aims of a society which already existed, and consequently had to be described if realism itself was not to lag behind the times. It imposed, however, a far more exacting demand, hardly compatible with realism in the traditional sense, when it insisted that the work of the conscientious writer must conform to a theory. A Russian proverb says, 'Sow the rye and the cornflowers will grow up on their own'. But this did not fit a socialist reality, which could not be relied upon to bear in due season the natural fruits of a socialist art. Therefore literature must carefully avoid too truthful a picture of the grim realities of Soviet life; it had to be more concerned with the achievement of a conscious purpose than with honestly portraying things as they are seen and felt. The sponsors of 'socialist realism', enlarging the critical legacy of Chernyshevsky and Dobroliubov, expected that every writer, to be worthy of his calling, must be quite unashamedly educational, in the specific sense of contributing deliberately to the creation of the next stage of social development aimed at by the state. Soviet literature must not only not be afraid of being tendentious; it should glory in being tendentious.

A great deal of this literature has been rather condescendingly criticized on the ground that since it is made to fit a given pattern it must inevitably

lack spontaneity. Alternatively it is disparaged for being too hastily written to meet the social programme of the moment. Both these types of criticism show some misunderstanding of the aims of Soviet literature, which, as a Russian response to a Russian internal situation, can hardly be judged by the standards of an alien tradition. Logically there is no contradiction between good literature and the optimistic expression of some particular purpose in society, between a work of art and a propaganda piece. Even if the 'purpose' sticks out a mile from its literary setting, it can still succeed as propaganda, provided it is attuned to the psychology of its readers in such a way as to stimulate their feelings and influence their actions in the direction required. The trouble arises, of course, when the author fails to infect his readers with any sense of live conviction. Fine phrases may camouflage ugly facts, but no form of art can ultimately succeed if it is quite divorced from the laws of its own inward structure; consequently the abstract argument and moral maxims, which may suitably adorn a critical essay or a sermon, merely defeat their own object if they are too artificially incorporated into the imaginative form of a novel, story, or poem.

In this connexion Gorky had to initiate another campaign—which he won—to prove that the diligent study and admiration of the classics did not contradict or in any way endanger the loyal pursuit of socialist realism. He maintained that the self-taught exponents of proletarian literature must be forced to overcome their initial clumsiness and provinciality by acquiring culture and the ability 'to choose from a dozen words the one that is simple, strong,

and beautiful'. Party policy and the more enlightened critics supported this 'reactionary' rehabilitation of the classics, which was found compatible with Marxist views of history. Voronsky, the editor of *Red Virgin Soil*, wrote as long ago as 1927: 'For the time being we are confronted with the task, not so much of overcoming and doing away with the art of the past, as with that of critically assimilating, studying, and adapting it. And, after all, will our transitional period produce any Tolstoys, Gogols, or Dostoevskys? No doubt that with us at present intelligence, talent, and will are focused on the social struggle and construction. It is not an accident that our age has produced Lenin, but is so far powerless to oppose its own artists to the brilliant pleiad of classics. The "hero of our times" comes from Lenin and not from Tolstoy, Belinsky, or Pushkin. . . . To find and embody him in art is the main task of contemporary literature. It has by no means been solved yet. What we want is less scolding, less officialdom and clichés and more of individual interpretation. We must learn from the masters of the past to look and see with our own eyes'.

This cult of the Russian classics was at once a symptom and a stimulus of two rising emotional developments in Russian life, the natural yearning to escape from the monotonous ready-made patterns and empty slogans (which had outlived their effectiveness) of the Five Year Plan literature, and a growing pride in Russia's past achievements and national character. The historical novel provided writers with an ideal outlet for both these types of feeling and its many individual variations. It was a

most alluring avenue of spiritual escape from the drab and perplexing present, and it could claim that it also expressed a socially beneficial patriotic trend. These novels usually recommended themselves ideologically by reflecting some landmark in Russian history seen in a new perspective on account of the revolution. Already in 1927 A. Chapygin's novel *Stenka Razin* had appeared, treating this chivalrous brigand, leading rebellion among the serfs, as an unconscious forerunner of communism. Y. Tynyanov's *Kukly*, dealing with the Decembrists, saw the liberal nobility in a similar light. Alexei Tolstoy's *Peter the Great*, a fine, unforced historical novel, went further by showing the Tsar himself as a revolutionary figure, a remote precursor of Lenin and Stalin, accomplishing with his terrific and cruel energy an initial 'revolution from above'. A whole crop of such novels sprang up, extending back into the more remote past. S. Borodin's *Dmitry Donskoy* extolled the Christian saint leading the Russian people in their struggle against the Tartars, and V. Kostylev's *Ivan the Terrible* found in this perverse tyrant a far-sighted Russian patriot, who did his country the inestimable service of crushing the centrifugal political power of the 'boyars', and fighting for a united powerful Russia with a 'window on to Europe' in the Baltic, which Peter was afterwards to open wide. Sergeyev Tsensky's massive *The Ordeal of Sevastopol* and Brusilov's *Break-Through* (dealing with the 1916 offensive in the Russian campaign against Germany) revived a glowing picture of the Russian Army's traditional heroism and powers of endurance, and Novikov-Priboy's *Tshushima* did the same service

for the naval battle in the Russo-Japanese War. V. Kataev's *The Lone White Sail* belongs to that special group of historical novels which aimed at reconstructing the sequence of purely revolutionary tradition, but it is unique among them for its literary charm. Its scene is laid in Odessa during the 1905 revolution and the action is woven round the adventures of two boys who help a sailor from the rebel battleship *Potemkin*. The novel has that enchanting freshness, *naïveté* and wealth of homely incident which so frequently enliven the best Russian children's literature.

It must not be supposed, however, that the new themes in Soviet literature caused an eclipse of the older basic ones, idealism applied to human society and intense preoccupation with the individual soul and character. The conflict raged round the reinterpretation, rather than the dissolution, of these older themes, particularly of the latter. The revolution could not for long be conceived exclusively as a world-shattering cataclysm or an inspiring struggle between rival classes and ideals, and literature could not afford to ignore it as a source of individual spiritual problems, which were rather stimulated than stifled by the appalling hardships of daily life, and which urgently insisted on attention for their own sake.

K. Fedin's ambitious novel *Cities and Years* (1924) was the first large-scale literary attempt thus to treat the revolution as a profound psychological problem of individual self-adaptation to the sweeping force of circumstances. It is movingly sincere but one-sided in its preoccupation with the more passive and negative sections of the surviving

Russian intelligentsia, and the chief character, Startsov, an unstable and sentimental kind of intellectual, who in spite of his well-intentioned efforts to participate, is bound to be swept away by the revolution, seems to deserve less indulgence than he receives from his author. In any case the full import of the psychological problem tends to be swamped by the complicated construction of the story and the number and variety of somewhat irrelevant episodes in which Startsov becomes entangled. Y. Olyosha's *Envy* (1927) treated the same theme of a natural conflict of feeling between the old and new Russian types, but in a more intellectual and symbolic manner. This novel aroused a storm of controversy when it was published. Its 'modernistic' technique, which puts the most startling visual images in close proximity to introspective dialogue in the manner of Dostoevsky, though not without an irritating flavour of artificial whimsicality and self-consciousness, is on the whole a successful medium for Olyosha's social-philosophical exposé. Certainly the contrast between the romantic character Kavalerov, the knight-errant of 'obsolete' feelings, and the materialistic worshippers of machinery and sport, is drawn with such skilful detachment that many critics were puzzled as to which of the two rival groups the author intended to satirize, and on which side—since it was held impossible for an author not to take sides—his own sympathies lay. I. Zamyatin's *We* is usually picked out as the most interesting example of an overtly counter-revolutionary psychological novel. Though written in Russia it was never published there, and it first appeared in English in New York (1925). It

forestalled Aldous Huxley's popular novel *Brave New World*, which it resembles as a witty satirical protest of deep-rooted indignation against a scientifically regulated but dehumanized society. Though its setting is Utopian and it never mentions Russia or the Soviet régime, the novel's satirical intentions are pointed enough, and it was obvious that no such powerful expression of oppositional feeling could ever be printed in the Soviet Union.

After the harnessing of literature to the first Five Year Plan, the literary reforms of 1932 had again shifted the emphasis placed by imaginative writers on these themes of personality and social ideals. All the adaptable elements of the old intelligentsia had already been assimilated to the new, and the 'planned' society, no longer a blue-print or an object of open controversy, was being visibly worked out in factories, farms, and offices. But there were still volcanic eruptions of fierce internal discord, and the mass treason trials and party purges of the later 'thirties had a cramping and intimidating effect on many imaginative writers, of whom some were swept away or reduced to silence, while others clung to party orthodoxy like drowning men to a lifeline.

From the point of view of pure socialist realism, first-class literary work could only be the outcome of a natural harmony between the innermost convictions of a talented writer and the prevailing phase of Leninist-Stalinist theory. But few writers could satisfy this exacting combination of intellectual, doctrinal, and artistic requirements, more particularly in the portrayal of the new man, the 'Bolshevik hero', whose image was held aloft for emulation as the embodiment of 'Soviet humanism', which should

strive to crush the more complex abundance of human values inherited from the great civilizations of the past. The sharp, rigid outlines of this determined and business-like character, fighting and working with fanatical energy, were endlessly discussed and publicized, but they turned out disappointingly dull, wooden, and stereotyped figures in the sphere of fiction. The fact that such characters remained lifeless abstractions was a source of repeated complaint by Soviet critics. A notable but isolated exception was N. Ostrovsky's largely autobiographical novel, *How Steel was Tempered*. It achieved an immense popular and official success, which continues even now, through providing at last a model but lifelike young Bolshevik in the shape of its hero, Pavel Korchagin, whose courage, stoical endurance, and resourcefulness were moulded and toughened under the dire stress of his personal tribulations in the revolution and the civil war. A younger writer whose work in characterization has also been singled out for special praise by Soviet critics is N. Virta, who was awarded a Stalin prize (see p. 243). His first novel, *Solitude*, deals with peasant resistance to the revolution. Its sequel, *Lawfulness*, contains a very frank description of the complicated activities of industrial wreckers and their anti-Soviet helpers; all these 'enemies of the people' are in the end hunted down and liquidated by loyal party men, and the moral of the book is to instil into its readers untiring 'Bolshevik vigilance' against those enemies who still remain at large. The uncompromising pursuit of a single set purpose certainly rings out in this novel with a militant and fanatical conviction.

Of the many plays of this period, D. Pogodin's *The Kremlin Chimes* is one of the few which has met with almost unqualified official and public approval and enduring popular success. There was a lurking danger that the public might grow sick of uniformly edifying plays and novels where virtuous Bolsheviks were always rewarded and wicked counter-revolutionaries irrevocably made to pay the penalty of their crimes. Consequently, the theme of the natural conversion and regeneration of individuals, formerly hostile or indifferent to the Soviet régime, played a most important part in the literature of the middle 'thirties. Pogodin's play presents us with a once prosperous engineer, who, since the revolution, has been reduced to selling matches in the street. He loathes the Bolsheviks, blames them for his unemployment, and is not afraid to say so, much to the horror of his wife, who fears that he runs the risk of sudden arrest at any moment. One evening a militiaman calls at the engineer's flat and takes him away to an unspecified destination. His family weep and prepare to say good-bye to him for ever. The engineer goes off with a pathetic little bundle of elementary necessities, hastily put together by his wife for what she assumes will be his first night in prison and perhaps his last night on earth. Much to his amazement he is taken, not to prison, but to the Kremlin, where he is promptly ushered, with his embarrassing bundle, into the awe-inspiring presence of Lenin himself, who receives him graciously, with Stalin standing at his right hand. These immensely busy leaders know all about his past, and after breaking the ice with some genial witticisms, Lenin immediately offers him a highly responsible job

in a vast new electrification scheme. The engineer's eyes are opened through this extraordinary interview. He accepts the job, and not out of self-interest alone, for he undergoes a process of conversion to faith in the régime. The recruitment of every surviving technician, whom they could trust, was of course indispensable for the economic programme of the Soviet Government, but apart from its obvious propaganda motive of rehabilitation through conversion and obedience, this play has some well-drawn human characters and plenty of humorous touches which have added a lot to its popularity. It is not surprising that, even without the magnificent resources of the Moscow Art Theatre to put it across, the play has been claimed as a shining example of the art of socialist realism.

A more comprehensive and monumental work than any of the foregoing is Alexei Tolstoy's long trilogy *The Way Through Suffering*, which sweeps through life in Russia from the eve of the revolution, traversing the world war and civil war down to the beginning of reconstruction. It lavishly mingles the requirements of socialist realism with the essential features of both the historical and the modern psychological novel, but it is filled, above all else, by a passionate love of Russia, and an almost mystical Slavophil worship of the Russian soil. The chief characters are members of the pre-revolutionary intelligentsia, who have the moral strength to go through and survive appalling vicissitudes, gradually come to accept the result of the revolution as a reincarnation of their own 'holy Russia', and adapt themselves courageously to the hard work which it imposes upon them. Individual personalities and their mixed motives are

presented with lifelike complexity, and some of the men who fought with the White armies during the civil war receive most sympathetic understanding as misguided patriots. The vast span of the novel is held together by the simple and enduring love story of two couples. Starting in a bohemian St. Petersburg, where Katya, the lawyer's wife, buys futurist paintings for her *salon*—to avoid the ghastly accusation of being old-fashioned—the novel ends at a public meeting in Moscow, where the same Katya, now an experienced school-teacher, is reunited with her new husband, Roshchin, a former White Guard officer, who, after gradual recognition of his errors, had transferred his loyalty and deserted to the Red Army.

During the last war with Germany, Soviet writers were of course obliged to throw every ounce of their strength and capacity into the immediate struggle, working only on war subjects, sometimes at the front, or on historical subjects strictly relevant to the war. For patriotic fervour rooted in the past rose to its climax at this time when Stalin announced: 'May the virile image of our great ancestors inspire you in this war', and when Prince Alexander Nevsky, Minin, and Pojarsky, and the Tsarist generals Suvorov and Kutuzov were added to the Soviet pantheon. But the decreed purpose of literature during the war was simply to serve as another weapon in the hands of the soldier, to inspire him to fight, to stimulate his hatred of the enemy and his determination to be revenged (Sholokhov's short story *Hate* is a striking example of the latter 'kind'). The bulk of this war literature was more like journalism, and consisted of short stories and front-line sketches, dashed off in the heat of the moment;

most of them were ephemeral records and could not be otherwise, but they hit their mark. The eloquent Ehrenburg, for instance, turned out a whole series of picturesquely vitriolic anti-German articles which were undoubtedly popular with the Red Army, on whose morale they had a bracing effect. Some of the stark and grimly vivid stories of N. Tikhonov (about the siege of Leningrad), of V. Grossman, and L. Sobolev are among the finest literary products of the war and have a more lasting quality. *The Test*, by A. Perventsev, has a certain documentary interest as one of the comparatively rare full-length novels describing the home front during the German invasion. It is about the enforced evacuation of an aircraft factory's plant and personnel from the Ukraine to the Urals during the rapid German advance. The character-drawing reveals the young communist writer's very simple and limited conception of personality and duty and the apparent absence of any deep spiritual tension in reconciling personal desires and conscience with social imperatives.

Judging by the periodic announcements of important Soviet critics, the indoctrinization of socialist realism, and the other reforms of 1932 had still failed to raise the standard of literature up to the expectations of the authorities, and in 1939 a new form of incentive had been introduced by the foundation of official annual prizes, named Stalin prizes (the highest amounted to 100,000 roubles), which were awarded to authors of what were judged to be the best works of fiction, drama, poetry, or criticism. These prizes, which carry with them an honoured status at least as important as their monetary value,

are a major sign of the respectful solicitude with which the Soviet state surrounds writers and other intellectuals who conform to its demands. The stimulus on the Soviet writer to produce is unique in another respect as well. He cannot fail to be disturbingly conscious of a personal responsibility to his vast reading public, to the millions of expectant and newly literate individuals with fresh receptive minds thirsting for enlightenment, an almost virgin soil, only waiting to be fertilized by the seed of the written word.

Such circumstances of pressure from above and from below explain the tremendous quantitative output of Soviet literature, which is, even so, quite insufficient to meet the latent public demand. In considering the question of its quality we must always remember that literature since the revolution depended on interaction and adjustment between the creative efforts of a few talented writers following their own conscience, and the more and more overwhelming regimentation imposed by others—not only by the authorities—in order to foster a literature which must consciously serve the immediate needs of a comprehensively planned society. There was no obvious logical flaw in the argument for fusing literature with political aims, and it was feasible to put this into practice once it was made an objective embodied in the education of youth. Artistic execution continued to present a more complicated problem, which could not be reduced to one of pure technique. The human imagination has never proved an obedient servant of its intellect—rather the reverse. Even the best-intentioned writer, carried away by the stream of his innermost feelings, might

fire the interest of his readers, but at the expense of failing to draw the approved moral conclusions. The final part of Sholokhov's epic novel *And Quiet Flows the Don*, aroused considerable misgivings, because the principal character failed to turn into a good Bolshevik. On the other hand, if the author made it his business to preach the right lessons, it might be at the risk of boring and irritating his readers by stale insipid imagery, repeating what they had previously seen more than once blazoned in the plainest language on the pages of *Pravda* or *Bolshevik*.

While the party line, as we have seen, imposed no written code of laws on literary work, it naturally maintained its firm and disciplinary grip on every sphere of activity, particularly when under the pressure of internal or external events, it occasionally changed its own direction. Stalin's defeat of Trotsky, the switch-over of total effort to the systematic construction of 'socialism in one country', followed by ominous forecasts of war with Germany and Japan, had all contributed to shaping and strengthening the new form of patriotic pride in the historic fatherland. This tide of feeling culminated in the 'Great Patriotic War', as the last war with Germany has been officially called, and the latest phase of Soviet literature is impregnated with an extraordinary blend of new and traditional images, which have not yet achieved stability or substantial synthesis. Judging, however, by the latest literary signs, the revived Russian patriotism, with its Slavophil affinities, renewed political interest in the Orthodox Church, and its self-centred projection into past history, still differs markedly from the old pan-Slav imperialism of the nineteenth century, with

which its manifestations have sometimes been too closely identified by outsiders. It certainly does not prevent the fiery patriot of the Russian fatherland from being proclaimed at the same time as an equally ardent and altruistic member of the international proletariat—often without conscious hypocrisy.

A long and authoritative article by the veteran revolutionary writer F. Gladkov (b. 1883) in the periodical *New World* (No. 4, 1945), surveys the present state of Soviet imaginative literature as a whole, and throws a most revealing light on the internal evaluation of this patriotic phase, and on what is most likely to follow it in the post-war realignment. 'A number of books have appeared,' writes Gladkov, 'which provoke many alarming thoughts. Let us take, for instance, the numerous historical novels. The question is bound to be asked; why have Soviet writers leapt back into the past so willingly? Soviet life is so rich in events, and the people, the heroes of these events, are so brilliant, interesting, and clear-cut, that writers have ample material here to describe and think about and tell to the world. It is, of course, quite natural to picture also the Russian people of the past. But why should so much attention be drawn to past centuries? Why are writers moved by all kinds of good deeds of legendary people of legendary times? Why are they not inspired by the patriotism and self-sacrifice of the Soviet people in their struggle, for instance, in the civil war, which was also a patriotic war? In depicting the people and deeds of bygone times the authors call into life ideas and tendencies foreign to the Soviet spirit. The smell of lavender, brocades, and minor gods is already much too strong, and

there are far too many epaulettes and insignia, metropolitans and tsars, although in those days also there was a class-struggle, and absolute despotic power established its rule over mountains of corpses and oppressed and exploited working-people. That is why it is all the more incomprehensible that authors of novels in the recent past should idealize tsarist officers, thus perverting history and giving the reader a false idea of that time. This is a stirring question for critics. But none of them, who were so militant earlier, have spoken and opposed these historical absurdities.'

Gladkov's sharp reprimands clearly indicate that the cult of history had greatly overstepped the mark set by the authorities and that its powerful emotional appeal through literature must be stopped. For a while it had served a useful purpose in unifying and strengthening national morale, but once it started to idealize the past at the expense of the present, its former usefulness was transformed into a social menace. While it was permissible to study the past in order to learn its skilled technique it was quite another thing for Russians to be either encouraged or allowed to go so far as to draw inspiration from the living soul of a past age. But since this had happened—particularly after party propaganda had pulled the patriotic string so hard—the boundaries had to be more firmly guarded than ever against dissatisfied trespassing minds which might deviate from the strict requirements of the Communist Party. That is why Gladkov appeals to the literary critics to play a more responsible part in analysing deeply the import of new literary works. 'Armed with Marxist-Leninist philosophy,' he writes,

'they should fight in the vanguard of the literary front. At a time when the Soviet Union is experiencing such great events, the writer must feel the deepest responsibility for his work. Every character he creates, every word he writes, must confirm the truth, inspire heroic deeds, arouse pride in his people, in the honour of belonging to them, in the fact that they are fulfilling the historic mission of liberating humanity from bloody violence and tyranny. Consequently a writer must be on a high ideological level. The Leninist-Stalinist theory is the only trustworthy path into the future, the only source of light which can brighten the complicated movement of the present day. Possessing this source of light, the writer will not be overpowered by immediate experience and superficial impressions, but will reach the real essence of Soviet life and express it in immortal characters.'

The article reaffirms, with the usual torrent of bombastic slogans, that literature must reflect reality and at the same time actively influence it by promoting the education of good Soviet citizens. It points out quite bluntly that among the mass of pre-war novels and stories devoted to labour in the new factories and collective farms and to pioneer feats of Soviet culture 'in the deserts and forests', only a very small number of really good books were ever written. The explanation given for this failure is a frank statement and warning that the majority of writers do not know the workers 'do not know their lives and cannot guess how rich and profound their souls are and how much creation is in their work. The theme of the working-class was and remains a very complicated and new theme in

literature.' These last sentences have a strangely dubious ring; they seem either to ignore the existence or deny the ability of numerous writers, impeccably proletarian by origin and upbringing, who have been given every conceivable encouragement in their literary work; they quite fail to explain why literary art had in fact fallen so low. The whole article can, however, be taken as a forecast of the tightening authoritarian grip in Soviet literature, its emphasis on more topical and politically edifying subjects, treated with a stronger proletarian flavour; the article also illustrates the technique of party discipline, applied in a professional manner through warning criticism from vigilant communist men of letters.

There is another vital question, hardly touched on in Gladkov's article, but which continues to excite constant concern in recent Soviet literary criticism. This is the natural revival of interest in the completer human personality moved from within by emotions and values transcending the dreary battle of ideologies, a personality which lives in literature in its own right and not as a deliberate illustration of something preconceived. A most illuminating analysis of this problem from the communist point of view was published in *Komsomolskaya Pravda*¹ (May 13th, 1944). The article is one of those periodic semi-official declarations of policy about literature, and is appropriately entitled 'Where is the literary hero of our times?' It starts with the all too familiar complaint that the ideal Bolshevik hero, with his straightforward, determined character, so essential to 'activizing' life, is still far from being

¹ *Komsomol Truth*, official organ of the Young Communist League.

satisfactorily embodied in literature. 'Among the many books about the war which for long and with good reason have achieved widespread popularity, there is not a single one in which the young man of the Stalinist epoch, who has lived alongside and participated in the superb deeds and tragic events of our time, has appeared in a truthful and finished portrait, executed by the hand of a Soviet patriot-artist. We have books about the great struggle of our people, standing firm in defence of its fatherland. . . . Many of these books will take their place in the heroic chronicles of our times, which future generations will study with enthusiasm. All that is indisputable. Nevertheless it seems that the time is ripe to announce loudly that our literature has not yet made the indispensable effort to create a full-blooded, lifelike, clear image of the young hero of our times. In the majority of cases the young heroes are shown *from outside* but not *from within*. They take part in events, accomplish deeds of daring, but their spiritual world remains essentially hidden from the reader.

'Literature is the mirror of a people's soul. The power of Russian literature lay always in its contact with the people, in its deep understanding of their needs, and truthful imagery of their life. It was not by chance that every important period of our history called into existence a literary hero whose name alone now conjures up for us the features of a whole social epoch and the characteristics of a whole generation of people living in the 'thirties, 'forties, 'sixties, or later years. In the first period it was Pechorin, in the second Bazarov, or Rakhmetov, in the third Pavel Glasov, in the fourth Pavel Korchagin

—people of different kinds, in no way resembling each other, but always young people. The Russian realistic writers, in their quest for truthful impressions of contemporary life, were irresistibly drawn by the image of a young person, for the rising generation always expressed most completely the spirit of the times and its dominating tendencies. Our best writers felt this acutely. Gorky often drew attention to it and aptly included all the classical Russian novels in a series which he called *The History of the Young Man of the Nineteenth Century*.

'More than a hundred years ago, when Lermontov's *A Hero of our Times* first appeared, Belinsky noted with astonishment how in spite of all the poverty of genuine poetic elements in the Russian society of that time, the author had managed to "reap an abundant harvest from that barren soil."

'No such difficulty confronts the artist of to-day. He is not standing on barren soil. He is surrounded by a surging life full of great feelings, poetry, and romance. Every day brings with it such a wealth of material themes and images which should be enough to satisfy the most exacting artist. The genuine writer, living in the interests of his time, cannot fail to see that remarkable people are growing up around him, that characters are being shaped which are novels and poems in themselves. Unfortunately up till now the reader learns more about them from newspaper reports and documents than from the artist-writer.' The article goes on to mention the letters of a young girl sniper, a Hero of the Soviet Union, written to her parents from the front. 'The letters of Natasha Kovshova are only one example out of a thousand. It is not enough to describe the

exploits of a young hero. It is necessary to penetrate into his feelings, to show not a dead schema, a model of good conduct, but a live human being with all the variety of his individual qualities.'

The writer of this article perceives a lot, but does he demand the impossible from the Soviet author? Whereas the heroes of nineteenth-century Russian literature mentioned by him were personalities freely created from life and differing from the average, the essence of the Bolshevik hero is whole-hearted conformity to a political party's preconceived model of what the average man should be like. Can it be that the young heroes in Soviet literature are only shown *from outside* because their inner motives in accomplishing great deeds do not correspond closely enough to communist theories of what those motives ought to be? We can hardly penetrate beyond that veil of wishful thinking which so much Soviet literature casts over its characters, but it is clear, as the author of the article observes, that any amount of documentation of stirring events is no substitute for that abundance of inward individual life which is so conspicuously lacking.

The real significance of contemporary Soviet literature is often underestimated or misunderstood by outside critics, who, judging it too much by their own standards, fail to see it as a local response to the internal politics of a quite differently constituted and almost self-sufficient society, whose men of letters have very little direct contact with the contemporary culture of the outside world. Whatever its educational and artistic shortcomings (and Soviet critics are the first to admit them, even though they explain them most unconvincingly),

Soviet literature has made a number of new and instructive experiments, which provide a revealing study of what has in fact happened to literature under a firmly established and omnicompetent socialist state.

Though they are unremittingly lashed onwards by the most exacting critical demands, in the fulfilment of which they have for various reasons fallen short, the majority of Soviet writers show plenty of self-confidence, and the two surveys quoted above are at least vigorous symptoms of what is expected from literature in its next post-war phase.

The Plenary Conference of the Union of Soviet Writers (June, 1947) fully confirmed the same line of policy¹ and agreed that 'Soviet patriotism' is and must remain 'our basic theme for a long time to come'. Its president, A. Fadeyev, nevertheless used this significant occasion to complain that 'among individual members of our intelligentsia, worship of abroad, together with respect for everything foreign, *kow-towing*, as the Central Party decree² described it, have far from died out'. (*Pravda*, June 30th, 1947). Evidently thirty years of party propaganda have failed to resolve the old internal conflict, and Bolsheviks turned Slavophil have still to silence growing misgivings among the new Westernizers, who have learned from bitter experience that Karl Marx was neither the best nor the last word in Western civilization. Such invincible admiration of

¹ The new periodical *Culture and Life* (started in June 1946) aims at instructing Soviet 'cultural workers' how they are to carry out this policy.

² Decree of the Central Committee of the Communist Party concerning the journals *Zvezda* and *Leningrad* (August 14th, 1946).

what exists, or is thought to exist, beyond the Soviet barriers, cannot honestly be reconciled with that glowing literary picture of Soviet people and institutions, which the party theme of Soviet patriotism demands from every writer. But the Communist party only reacts against this state of spiritual isolation by proclaiming more loudly than ever that authors *must* produce 'a profound exposition of the theme of Soviet patriotism, of national pride, and denunciation of the decayed putrescent culture of the bourgeois West.' (*Literary Journal*, July 6th, 1947). Why Soviet authors are still in need of such peremptory commands, if this is the way they already feel at heart, how they can write genuine books, free from servile hypocrisy, if they do not believe in the things they are told to praise, and how they can convincingly denounce a 'putrescent culture' from any 'genuine intimate knowledge of which they are sedulously shut out by their rulers—all these are questions which, far from being answered, cannot safely even be asked by any Soviet citizen.

In the Soviet Union, as in the whole world, the present period and its reflection in literature, is still one of painful transition, during which the task of satisfying manifold material needs must cause other aspirations to be temporarily maimed or suppressed. Provided the prolonged suffering and struggles of the Russian people are at last rewarded by a period of greater social stability and by a wider freedom of expression for those individuals who are creative enough to need it, then the hitherto inexhaustible Russian vitality may again be able to find its way into literary works of universal human value. But up till now the iron discipline

and respectful obedience to authority, which the Soviet rulers have found essential in practice for maintaining industrial efficiency and administrative order, show no signs of having been successfully adapted to the very different sphere of imaginative literature and thought.

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